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OR,

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NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

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THE BLACK PRINCESS.

CHAPTER I.

KNIGHT-ERRANTRY.

"WELL Mart, shall we follow it any further, or shall we give it up for a bad job?"

"Give up nothin'—I ain't that kind. Dad fergot that part, when he l'arned me what I know. Why, what should we give it up fer?"

"I leave it to you; I don't care one way or another. Only we have followed them for full ten miles, and the trail's no fresher now than when we first started. Our friends may be uneasy about us."

"'Bout you, mebbe—not me. Lord, boy, they know the red-skin don't w'ar paint as kin throw dust in my eyes, or lay me on my back. Why they're all afeerd o' me, the red's is. I see'd one t'other day, an' jest sorter whispered my name in his ears, like, when hope may never see the back o' my neck ag'in ef he didn't turn an' begin to shake moccasin jest a *leetle* the liveliest. Lord, Frank, talk 'bout runnin'—*he* was thar, *he* was, when it kem to *that*."

"Why sir, he actilly run so fast thet the wind tuck his ha'r off, every sp'ar; sorter sowed it broadcast. Left a greasy trail ahind him, did thet red. Run so fast the fat melted all out o' him. Keeled over when the last drop left, he did. I found him thar, leanin' 'g'inst a tree. Goin' to stuff the critter an' use him for a scar'crow to hum, soon's this pesky Black Hawk's did fer."

"Mart Shafer," said the other scout, half-disgustedly, "if I were only one half the man you *think* you are, this world wouldn't begin to hold me. I do beleive that you'd rather tell a lie than eat, any day. You never open your mouth but what I look for a whopper."

"It's a good trade ef well follered, Frank," laughed the young man called Shafer. "Thet's what purty nigh all my schoolin' was on. Dad teached me. You know dad; Pete Shafer, what used to be called 'Lyin' Pete,' 'ca'se he hed a good 'magination. He teached me, like his dad did him. He says I'm a chip o' the old block, but I cain't quite hoe a row 'th him yit. He's too hefty fer me, but I'm 'provin'—yas, I'm 'provin'," meditatively added Shafer, stroking his chin, that was sparsely covered with a flaxen down, complacently called "my b'ard" by Mart.

The two persons thus introduced—Frank Barham and Martin Shafer—were not yet twenty years of age, at the time our tale opens. Some who read this may remember the names, and for their benefit we state that these two were descendants of our old friends, Peter Shafer and Uriah Barham.

Not only were they as close and steadfast friends as their fathers had been before them, but each had inherited the features and more peculiar traits of those worthies. Both were brave, even to recklessness. Martin—like Peter—was an outrageous liar, in the more harmless sense of that word.

He would not tell a malicious falsehood, with intent to injure one, but it seemed as though his riotous imaginations could find vent in no other way. He appeared to take exquisite pleasure in romancing.

One of his ridiculous fabrications he would roll over his tongue, like an epicure tasting a tidbit. And the best of it was, his face was "sober as a judge's," and only the twinkle of his keen gray eye told that he did not really believe them himself.

Martin, like the worthy Peter, was of a tall, somewhat bony build, yet in face and form was more graceful and pleasing than the father, of light, sandy complexion, wearing a neat suit of buckskin, plain and unornamented, save with tags cut from the same material.

His companion, Frank Barham, was some inches shorter than Martin, of a powerful, yet gracefully-symmetrical form; a perfect brunette. His dress was much the same as Shafer's, and their weapons were alike; rifle, knife and brace of pistols.

Twenty years before—in 1812—their parents had married,

and the young scouts first beheld the light within one week of each other. Living upon adjoining farms, they had renewed the previous life of their fathers.

Where one might be, the other was not far distant. Together they learned to hunt, fish, swim, and to trail the wild beasts to their lair. Though they often fought each other, it was more from excess of love than anger, and the next day—if not the next hour—they were more confidential than ever.

Peter Shafer—the same old Pete of Tippecanoe memory—devoted many a day to teaching his young pupils the art of woodcraft and hunters' lore. He taught them to follow a blinded trail; to read signs in a blade of grass or a bent twig; and although they had not as yet an opportunity of measuring their skill with a deadly enemy of the human species, ere they were fifteen, Peter pronounced them "able to hoe their own row," with the best scout of the frontier.

One of the boys would often start off into the woods and endeavor to hide his trail, while the other would trace him out, if possible. Thus their youthful days were spent, attended with hard labor upon the farm, and when trouble once more transplanted peace, it found the young scouts amply prepared, as they were eager to take a prominent or at least active part in the struggle.

Black Hawk, the renegade Sauk chief, had recovered from his affright of 1831, and in the following spring—when our story opens—he crossed the Mississippi with a strong force, bent on accomplishing what Pontiac and Tecumseh had failed in doing—of uniting all the Indians of the West, from Rock River to Mexico, in a war of extermination against the pale-faces.

On the 14th of May, of that year—1832—occurred the battle of Stillman's Run, where the whites were disastrously defeated. War was now inevitable, although Keokuk, head chief of the Sauk tribe, controlled the majority of his people; but numbers of the young braves, scenting blood, flocked to the standard of Black Hawk.

Frank and Martin could no longer be controlled, and, indeed, their parents did not attempt doing so. Peter Shafer and Uriah Barham themselves took the field, and with them went "the boys."

Detailed for scouts to discover the whereabouts of the enemy, the two youths had struck a double trail that forenoon, and had traced it up for several hours. Then the trail divided, one man going each way. Here it was that the scouts paused, and asked the question recorded at the head of this chapter.

"Well, never mind the lying part, Mart," added Barham. "That is the only thing I will acknowledge you can beat me at. But what shall we do? Separate and each take a trail, or both follow the same one?"

"Supperate, *in co'se*. I'll take this one—you go t'other. This is old Blacky hisself, I know. I'm goin' to captur' the pesky imp, sure. Then I'll seddle him an' ride him inter camp. Lord! just think! Won't thar be fun? Mebbe I won't be the biggest toad in the puddle *then*, I gues not!"

"Bah! why, Mart, if you should happen to see the chief, you'd run from him, sure. And you'd be right in doing so, too, for you'd only be a mouthful for him," laughed Frank.

"Run nothin'! But, jest s'posen he *should* slick a feller in? Lord! wouldn't he think he'd swallowed a young airth-quake, ef he ever got me in thar? Wouldn't I jest natur'ly kick up a bobbery in his applecart! Oh no—jist gi' me some o' thet!" muttered Martin, jerking his arms and legs about like those of an old-fashioned jumping-jack.

"He'd do it, sure. But if you say so, let's travel. Take whichever you please—I will trace out the other. Where shall we meet?"

"Over thar at the knob. The feller what gits thar fust 'll wait for t'other. Git out now; I'm goin'."

So the two brother scouts separated and each devoted their utmost attention to the task immediately before him. Leaving Frank for awhile, we will follow Shafer, who—though he little dreamed of it then—was fated to become involved in an adventure that was to shape the entire future of his life, whether for good or evil—happiness or grief.

For nearly an hour he strode along without experiencing any particular difficulty in keeping the lightly-impressed trail. His father's teachings stood him in good stead now, and he proved how thoroughly he had learned his business.

"I do actilly b'lieve thet this is thet pesky Black Hawk,"

muttered Shafer, reflectively. "It's jest like his feet, thet track is. I never sot eyes on it afore, but I know it's *his*. Le's see; what'll I do when I meet him? Shall I shoot the cuss, or pick im up an' tuck him onder my arm, an' then kerry him to camp? No, thet'll be too much like *work*. Hooray! I know now!

"I'll jest take off my hat an' make a purty bow, an' say thet his gal hes sent me fer him. Thet she wants to see him on very *pressin'* bizness. It'll tickle him, thet will, an' he'll say, '*in co'se, le's go.*' Then I'll lead him slap dab inter camp, an'— Thunder!"

The young ranger abruptly paused and bent his head in acute listening. From not very far before him came the sound of a woman's voice, either in anger or affright.

Then he heard a hoarse voice, as evidently that of a man. Again came the tones of the first speaker, and with firmly-compressed lips, Shafer sprung forward, assuring himself that his rifle was in readiness for instant use, in case it should be needed.

A half-score bounds carried him through the dense growth of bushes, to the edge of a small glade, in which stood the persons who had uttered the cries. For a moment Shafer stood staring in surprise.

Two figures were there, male and female; man and woman, or rather girl, if age was only taken into consideration. Two forms struggling desperately together for the mastery.

One was an Indian, above the medium hight, athletic and muscular, evidently in the full prime of life and strength. He was plainly dressed—if the scanty drapery that left his arms and body bare, may be called dress—without any distinguishing marks of rank, save in the war-plumes plucked from the gray eagle's wing, that adorned his head.

His features, naturally harsh and repulsive even beyond the generality of his race, were now rendered almost demoniac by the hideous scowl of rage and pain. The blood was running freely from a long gash in his cheek.

Even then, as she struggled with desperate vigor, the young scout could not help remarking the beauty of this girl, who still sent up her cries for help. In one hand she clasped

a small knife, whose crimsoned blade betrayed its agency in making the wound upon her savage assailant.

She seemed but a child in the grasp of the stalwart savage, yet she fought desperately, biting and scratching—as Mart afterward expressed it—like a whole nest of wildcats. Still, the result was only a question of time ; she was fast growing weak under the fearful exertion.

There was a spot, softer than the rest, in the heart of the young scout, that any thing in the shape of a woman was sure to touch. His chivalry was aroused, and a moment sufficed to decide his course.

With a swift leap he sprung forward and took part in the drama. One hand clutched the savage by the throat, and then, like a dart, his right fist clenched like a rock, struck the brute a crushing blow between the eyes, tearing him from the scout's grasp and hurling him twice his length distant, where he lay upon the greensward, gasping and quivering faintly, while the dark blood oozed from his mouth and nostrils.

"*Thar—ye corn-twisted, limber-legged son o' a thunder-mug, you ! how d'ye like *thet*, anyhow ?*" muttered Shafer, as he glowered at the fallen savage. "'Pears like you got sleepy all to a sudden ! Don't want no piller, nor nothin', don't ye ? Mebbe you won't hug no more gals— Thunder ! I purty nigh forgot !" muttered Martin, abruptly turning toward the girl, a deep flush suffusing his sun-embrowned countenance.

We have already said there was a soft spot in his composition, peculiarly susceptible to the charms of the opposite sex, and so there was. In truth, the young scout, though brave and daring to a fault when in competition with those of his own sex, was inordinately bashful where women were concerned.

He revered the very ground upon which a woman trod, and yet he would far rather have taken a sound thrashing than to meet one face to face, where he must encounter the bright glance from her eyes. Perhaps this was because he respected them so very highly. He felt they were of superior mold to himself.

And never before did he feel this bashfulness more acutely than at the present moment, when he turned and met the

wondering gaze of the young girl whom he had rescued from insult, if no more. And there is little doubt but what he betrayed more genuine heroism in resisting the inclination that assailed him of taking to his heels and fleeing from those beaming orbs, than he did in attacking the savage.

"Who are you?" softly uttered the maiden, the words thrilling through the frame of the young scout, until he fairly trembled.

"Who—me? Why, I'm—I'm *me*!" stammered Martin, involuntarily retreating a pace.

Perhaps it was fortunate that he did so, else he might never have left that spot alive. This half-turn brought the Indian within range of his vision.

That worthy had already begun to recover from the blow, and as he rose to a sitting posture, one hand had partially drawn his hatchet, while a malignant gleam filled his fast-darkening eyes. However, it was more an instinctive action than one of intention; his faculties of mind were still bewildered.

With an angry cry, Shafer sprung forward and clutched the arm, wrenching the gleaming weapon from the red skin's grasp, and then, while one foot pressed the savage to the ground, Martin removed the scalping-knife as well, together with the bullet-pouch and powder-horn. Then securing the rifle, Shafer stepped back.

"Git up from thar, you dumbasted nigger you. Git up, I say, an' don't you offer to run, 'less you want somethin' to hit ye ag'in."

The savage slowly rose erect, and stood glowering fiercely upon the young scout. Shafer appeared to like this, and added, tantalizingly:

"You air a pretty bird, you air! Don't feel mean nor nothin', don't ye? Couldn't find a ha'r o' ye ef you was to look through your clothes with a fine comb, you feel so pesky little. Run off thar an' ther female gal, won't ye? Hag her till she's squirts an' in, an' in. Ugh! You pizen critter! You karned squirts! Makes me mad, it does, jest to think. I swow to ge-lory I could jest take an' swaller you, like, huffs an' all, I'm so pesky mad!"

Truly, the young ranger did look any thing but pleased

as he gazed upon the crestfallen wretch, his eyes glittering and his face deeply flushed. He looked really handsome then, despite his angular, bony frame, and the dark eyes of the maiden he had interfered to save, dwelt with a softened light upon him.

"The white brave talks big words," slowly uttered the savage, using very fair English. "He has two guns. He would not *dare* say so, if the Indian had one."

"Git out! don't talk to me! Hold yer hush ef ye don't want to be 'nihilated. I'm gittin mad, I be. Bile over party soon, an' then you'll git scalded, *you* will. Don't want to hurt ye no more'n I hev did a'ready. Wouldn't kill ye for no money. Couldn't git my hands clean ag'in with all the water o' the Illin'ise.

"D'ye hear? You'd better git. I'll let ye go this time, but don't let me catch ye foolin' round here no more. I'll let ye next time. You'll think a mountain led fell on ye, ef I do. I weigh a thousan' an' strike a ton, I do! Travel—I give ye hafe a-nour an' then I'm a'ter ye. Git!"

There was no mistaking his meaning. The savage shrank involuntarily before the gleaming blue eyes. He saw danger—death in their depths.

With one longing glance at his confiscated weapons, he turned and darted into the bushes.

A minute after, a wild yell broke upon the air. Shafer smiled ominously. Right well he read its meaning. He knew that the savage had registered a vow; that now one or the other must die.

It was the war-whoop of the Sauk tribe.

CHAPTER II.

MABEL CALMET.

MARTIN cast a sidelong glance toward the maiden. It was a comely sight that met his eyes ; one that caused the blood to tingle and dance in his veins.

She was barely five feet in height, her form lithe and rounded, perfect as a sculptor's dream, displayed to advantage by the peculiar garb she wore. She was young—not more than eighteen—but she was already a woman.

A brunette, her skin, clear and soft, glowed with a tint that betrayed the presence, in some faint degree, of aboriginal blood. Her hair, black as night, silken and glossy, hung far down her back, secured only by a scarlet ribbon that crossed above her forehead. Her eyes, large and lustrous as those of a yearling doe's. Her cheeks, plump and deeply-tinged with color, the traces of her recent struggle ; the white, even teeth, shining from behind their ruby portals, the graceful neck, the heaving bosom ; all in all, the picture of a wildwood beauty, such as is seldom beheld, save in a poet's dream.

This form, clothed in a short dress of crimson cloth, gayly embroidered with beads and silk, leggings of fawn-skin, tanned soft and white moccasins that displayed the tiny, high-arched foot and rounded ankles, was what met the bewildered gaze of our young ranger.

"Gee-rusalem pancakes ! Slapjacks an' maple 'lasses ! Go 'way, honey—you've lost your taste !" murmured Shafer, unconsciously, staring at the maiden with awe-stricken rapture.

"Did you speak ?" softly uttered the maiden, a slight smile playing around her arched lips, and a roguish gleam sparkling in her eyes.

"Eh—what—was talkin' ?" stammered Shafer, flushing up.

"No matter—you only thought aloud. But I must thank you for your kindness. That brute would have overpowered me in another minute. You are very brave, Mr.—" and as

the maiden spoke, she advanced with outstretched hands toward the scout, who shrunk back, while his stalwart form quivered like a leaf.

"No I ain't—I'm a pesky coward—that is, I—how air you, any how? An' your folks, all well?" spluttered Martin, as his hands slowly clasped those of the fair maiden.

"I believe so; but I fear you are not. Your hands are hot, and you tremble as though you had the ague. You are ill!"

"No I ain't—that is, I am if *you* say so. I'll be better if you don't look at me. Doctor says its a queer disease—a pesky gal makes me feel so the hull time. Runs in the family, it does. Pop was tuck the same way. He got tuck off just by a gal's lookin' at him; only he tuck her with him. Wish I could do the—that is you—Thar! I knowed it! Pesky fool!" disgustedly muttered Shafer, releasing one hand and dashing the drops of perspiration from his heated brow.

"Who—me?" and the girl's eyes laughed merrily.

"Thunder! no. Now, miss, look a-here. I'm a feller what don't know much 'bout nothin' an' still less 'bout female gals. I love 'em—or would ef I wasn't sech a pesky coward. I'd walk a mile on my bar' head to sarve one o' thar little fingers; but I'm afeard o' them, the pesky ones most o' all.

"I run out o' doors an' slep' in a brush-heap all o' one night, last winter, 'ca'se Mary Molley wanted to kiss me, an' yit I used to hide up sta'rs an' peck down through a knot-hole at her fer hours at a time. I'm jest so, ye see. I used to like to look at her, she was so pesky pesky; ef nobody wa'n't a lookin' at *me*. I'd make a hull supper jest out o' that. But I must look at *her* no more, *now*!"

"Really, you are improving, I must say," and the maiden blushed. "But never mind that now. It will wear off in time, but until it does, you need not be ashamed of the feeling. But I must know your name—mine is Mabel Calmet."

"I'm Martin Shafer."

"Shafer—I have heard my father speak of that name; of one Peter Shafer," said Mabel, thoughtfully, "a comrade of his in the last Indian war."

"Pierre Calmet, a scout against the red-skins?"

"Yes."

"Pop is the feller! I've heerd him tell lots o' 'Black Pierre'."

"It is the same. He will be very glad to meet the son of his old comrade, even if you had not rendered me this service. You must come to the house. He would never forgive me if I allowed you to go away without calling upon him."

Stafer looked undecided. He remembered his compact with Frank Barham, but then a glance at the eager face of the maiden decided him. Frank might wait. Somehow Stafer did not feel as great an awe of this girl as he generally did when the fair sex was concerned.

"Say you will go—besides, I am afraid to go alone. There may be more Indians about."

"Yas, I'll go, an' much 'bliged. Lord! it makes me feel mad all over, jist to think o' that owdacious red-skinned imp! To tetch sech as *you* be, an' in *sech* a way!"

"He took me by surprise, or I could have run away from him. He is a bad man—a very bad man!" added Mabel, thoughtfully.

"Why, do you know him?"

"Yes. It was Black Hawk."

"What!" almost yelled Martin, in astonished chagrin. "That imp, an' I didn't know it! I hed my hand on 'im, an' then let him go! Oh, ef I'd only 'a' knowed it afore!"

"He is your enemy, then?"

"In *course*, an' the inemy of all decent white men. I would rather 'a' gi'n my left hand then to 'a' hed this happen. With him dead or a pris'ner, this war would be stopped afore it began. I've sworn to take the imp 'ither dead or alive, an' now I sw'ar it ag'in!"

"I hope you will succeed. I did not think I was so frightened, or I should have told you then. Bat hark!"

The sound of heavy footsteps rapidly approaching was now quite plainly to be heard. Stafer sprang before Mabel, and threw forward his rifle.

"Jump ahind the tree, Mabel; they shain't hurt ye while I live," he muttered, impressively.

The maiden fell back a pace, but then stood still, her gaze bent upon the point from whence proceeded the echoing footsteps. She did not appear greatly alarmed, a life of border

peril and trials had inured her to this. She felt curiosity rather than fear.

Shafer stood with rifle in readiness, firmly believing that he was about to be attacked by Black Hawk, who had by some means procured weapons, or else had met with some of his braves. His only anxiety was for the welfare of the maiden. She had won her way to his inner heart, even in this short time.

A large, dark figure pressed through the bushes, and paused with a short cry directly before the young couple. Shafer half-raised his rifle, when the clear voice of Mabel rang out as she sprung forward between the two.

"Do not fire—it is my father!"

"Who is this—what does this all mean, child?" demanded the new-comer, in a rather harsh tone, his full, black eye already scanning the form of the young hunter, who had now lowered his rifle and was leaning nonchalantly upon its muzzle.

"It is an old friend—or rather the son of an old friend, father," quickly rejoined Mabel. "He saved me from Black Hawk, and—"

"Saved you?"

"Yes, I was walking slowly along, thinking, when the brute sprung out and caught me. I struck him, and my knife made a mark upon his face that will last him forever. But he was too strong for me, and I called out for help. This gentleman heard me, and then set me free."

"You did—let me thank you," cried the father, warmly pressing the hand of Shafer. "But the red thief, Black Hawk, where is he? Did you lift his scalp?"

"No—bigger fool me," disgustedly returned Mart. "I didn't know who he was until I'd gi'n him hafe a-nour to start on. Then she told me. Ef I'd 'a' knowed it afore, I'd 'a' skulped the cuss alive, but what I'd 'a' finished him."

"A pity you did not; 'twould have saved much misery and bloodshed. But how is it? Mabel says you're the son of an old friend."

"I'm Poto Shafer's boy."

"What! honest? Then give me your hand again. I know him like a book in '12. You've heard of Black F'erre!"

Well, that's me. And Pete—how is he? Is he well—does he lie as much as ever? Ah! many's the side-ache that nimble tongue of his has given me! And yet he would lie more truthfully than I could tell the honest truth. I would walk twenty miles any day, just to hear him once more."

"You may hear him 'thout that, for he is out ag'in. He smelt the fun an' would come, though man tried mightily to keep him back."

"Where is he now?"

"With Maje Demint. But now I reckon I'll go. I've got a friend out yon' an' promised to meet him afore dark, at the knob. He'll think I've got inter trouble ef I stay any longer."

"Make him come to the house, father," whispered Mabel, whose bright eyes had been closely scanning the features of the young scout, who really appeared quite a different person while conversing with one of his own sex.

"You hear, my friend?" and Black Pierre chuckled. "You must come. Mab is a queen here, and gives her subjects no rest until they obey. You will come—if only for a few minutes. Your friend can wait; or I will go after him, if you'd rather."

Shafer hesitated only for a few moments; then a shy glance at the eager countenance of Mabel decided him.

"Wal, I guess I kin spar' a leetle time. Frank kin wait; the one who got thar fust was told so, anyhow. You mought not find him thar, even ef you went. You'll promise not to ax me to stay a'ter dark?"

"If you must go; but I wish you could stay longer. I am getting very uneasy, especially since hearing that about Black Hawk. He never was any friend of mine, and now he will have a good excuse to search me out."

"Why don't ye pack up an' move to some other place, whar you'll be safer?" and there was a peculiar shade of anxiety in the glance Mart directed toward Mabel.

"Because my son, Justin, is not able to be removed. He is ill—very ill, and it would be his death. Only for that I would have gone to live with my wife's kindred, the Winnabagoes, until this cloud blows over. As it is, I can only wait and hope for the best."

The trio were rapidly walking along through the forest, that was now more open and less entangled with undergrowth. Black Pierre questioned Mabel closely concerning the words and actions of Black Hawk, and seemed deeply troubled.

He had heard the cries of his child, while watching in his turn beside the sick-bed, while she took the fresh air, and rushed toward the spot, knowing that nothing but great peril could cause those shrieks. He found that the trouble he had long foreseen, was now close at hand.

He had casually alluded to his wife's kindred, as being the Winnebago Indians. Such was indeed the case.

Black Pierre was a well-known and widely-celebrated character of the western border, at the time of which we treat. A hunter and trapper, he had become a firm friend of the tribe named.

The head chief, Makisabe, had married a young French woman, whom he had captured years before, in early youth, and by her he had, among others, one very beautiful child, called *Howausa*, or "The Singer."

Black Pierre won the love of this girl, and they were legally married by a priest or missionary, who was sojourning temporarily with the tribe. Together they lived very happily and contentedly, with the exception that all but their first two children had died in early childhood. These two—Justin and Mabel—were taught by a friendly priest, and for that time, received an unusually thorough education.

Then their mother sickened and died, and Black Pierre in his great sorrow, unable to reside where every thing spoke of his lost one, left the tribe and settled at the point where we now find him. Here he devoted part of his time to cultivating the rich land, and soon had a fine farm, although still half his time was spent in trapping and hunting.

The threatening war-cloud had not been unobserved by him, but he trusted it would blow over, and so he neglected removing to safety, until it was too late. His son was attacked by a debilitating fever, and was now lying very low.

Thus affairs stood when the events of our tale bring them before the reader.

Shafer accompanied his two new-found acquaintances to their home, and while he smoked a pipe and conversed with Pierre, Mabel busied herself about supper. The eyes of the young scout followed her every motion, only turning away when the maiden flashed a bright glance upon him.

The poor fellow was really in a hard way. It was a case of love at first sight with him, and holding such a modest opinion of his own worth, he felt strangely discomposed, and at the same time supremely happy.

And yet Mart fairly excelled himself, as Black Pierre boldly drew him out. The old hunter remembered the peculiar talent of the father, and soon found that it was by no means omitted in the composition of the son. Even the very invalid laughed aloud, more than once, at the quaint speech and wondrous fabrication of the young scout.

But there came a sudden and startling interruption that changed all this as if by magic. The crisis Black Pierre had so long dreaded, had come at last.

Mabel stepped to the door, but suddenly started back with a shrill cry of terror. As she did so, a loud whoop of exultant triumph broke upon the air, and several arrows came hurtling into the cabin, through the open doorway.

With a hoarse cry, Black Pierre sprung forward and hurling the heavy door to, dropped the stout bars into their sockets; then secured the shutters of the one window, in the same manner. Meanwhile Martin had not been idle.

Seizing his rifle he sprung to a loop-hole, and gazed out. He beheld at least a score of savages crossing the open space, heading toward the door, yelling and hooting like demons.

There could be no mistaking their intentions, even had not the arrows been fired so viciously. Death and enmity were indelibly imprinted upon the countenance of each and every one.

Our friend was not one to hesitate long, and thrusting his rifle through the loop, Shafer took a quick aim at the foremost, and touched the trigger. A shrill yell of horrible death pain broke through the other cries, as the savage, springing high into the air, fell in a quivering, senseless heap upon the ground, tearing the greenward in his death agony.

As he drew his pistols, Shafer felt the entire building tremble, as the Indians rushed in a body against the door. But that had been built with an eye to some such event, and it did not even rattle upon its hinges.

Then came three quick reports; two from Martin's pistols, and one from the rifle of Black Pierre. The red-skins passed in alarmed dismay. Then Mabel added her quota to the salute, with unerring aim.

This completed the repulse, and catching up their dead and wounded, the red-skins retreated in hot haste, soon disappearing amid the dense woods, beyond rifle-shot. This was merely the overture; the real drama had yet to commence.

The cabin had been built by one well versed in border life and perils. It was in the center of an extensive clearing, and with one exception, no cover existed by which a position within close rifle-range could be gained. That was the corn-field, now in the "silk," that extended to within some two score yards of the rear of the house.

The first move of the besieged after the retreat of the enemy, was to reload their weapons, knowing full well that they would all be needed ere long. Then while they maintained a close watch, the two men conversed in low, guarded tones.

"What next, d'y' think, old man?" asked Martin, casting a sidelong glance toward Mabel, who was peering through a loop-hole at the opposite side of the building.

"They'll probably wait until dark and then come again. They thought to take us unawares, I guess, or they'd never have tried that."

"How air the logs an' ruff? Kin they burn 'em?"

"I think not. The logs are white elm, and full of sap. The roof is shingled with slippery elm bark, and would hardly burn in a fire-place. No, we need not fear that. Their only way will be to burst in the door or else starve us out. I only hope they may try the last. We have food and water enough for a month."

"I'm dubious Frank 'll git tired o' waitin' fer me at the knob," chuckled Shafer, but still not without an air of uneasiness, for he well knew the rash, headstrong disposition of Barham, and dreaded lest he should get into difficulty in

trying to learn why Mart had failed to keep his appointment.

"I am sorry that I drew you into this trouble, my friend, upon your account. But I am glad there is one more strong arm to help defend the cabin. I could not do much alone."

"You didn't draw me into it—~~she~~ did that," muttered Martin, nodding toward Mabel; then, as he noted the swift blush that suffused her face, telling that his words had reached her ear, he turned pale and trembled like a leaf.

And yet, though so terribly frightened, Shafer was glad in his heart that she had heard his words. The poor fellow was very far gone, indeed.

"If we only could get word to the Winnebagoes, all would be well. Their village is not over ten miles from here, and they would turn out to a man for me. But it is too late now. I couldn't get out without those hounds seeing me. Besides, I couldn't leave Justin," gloomily added Black Pierre.

"I'll try it ef you say so. I'd do a heap more'n that fer *her*—to do you all a sarvice," eagerly muttered Martin.

"No, I could not allow that. It would be certain death for one of us to show outside. I make no doubt Black Hawk is there himself, and he has sworn blood against you, if you read his whoop aright. No, we must fight it out. We'll trust in Providence and our own skill. I have feared this for nearly a month. Black Hawk asked me for Mabel, there, and I flatly refused the impudent thief. I doubt not he swore revenge, for he is a very touchy and high strung fellow."

"He'll be higher strung 'en that, ef I ever lay hands on the impudent cuss," angrily gritted Mart. "*He* want *her*! Ah, git out! It makes me *mad*—durned ef it don't! I could jest claw him up an' spit him through a knot-hole—ef 't would be a nasty mouthful. The pesky imp," and the irate scout growled on with ludicrous fierceness as he glared out upon the still forest, eagerly watching for an opportunity to make his mark upon the enemy.

The minutes slowly rolled on, and the dark shades of night settled down upon the earth. The nearly full moon was obscured by dense clouds that floated along in broken masses.

This was another source of uneasiness to the besieged. By its aid the red-skins could succeed in creeping up to the build-

ing without being discovered until they should unmask of their own accord.

"Look yonder!" suddenly cried the keen-eyed scout, as a suspicious movement caught his eye. "Darned if they hadn't went an' got a big hill an' air a-rollin' it up here to knock the shanty over!"

"No," said Black Pierre, "they're going to try and burn us out. See! it's a pile of brushwood they are shoving before them. But I don't think it will work. Keep your rifle ready, for if they set fire to it, we must get a sight of some of them."

The huge heap, nearly as broad as the cabin, and quite as tall, was slowly being impelled toward the house, by some invisible power. It was a strange sight, and one well calculated to make the defenders uneasy.

"I know—they've got my old sled, and have piled it up with brush, and are pushing it from behind!" at length muttered Black Pierre.

"You're shure o' the logs?"

"I think so. But we will find out in a short time now. One thing; if it *don't* burn us up, it may be the means of saving us all."

"How's that?"

"Why it will make such a blaze that they will see it from the village, and as this is the only cabin in this section, the Winnebagoes will send out to see what is up."

"I'd rather they'd see it afore the imps sot a-fire to it: But I don't guess they kin," meditated Shafer.

"Hist! watch close and don't waste your ammunition," continued Black Pierre, as the sled struck against the door-step with a slight jar.

Then, as they watched keenly, the moon suddenly emerged from behind a cloud. The bright rays revealed the forms of fully a dozen red-skins stealthily gliding away toward the forest.

Two rifle-shots were sent after them, with unerring aim, and amid the wild yells and shouts of alarm that followed, another cloud swept athwart the moon's face. But the defenders had seen enough to show that their aim had not been altogether in vain.

Then, as all else became silent for a moment, another sound met the ears of the anxiously-listening defenders. This was

a slight, clicking noise; there could be no mistaking its meaning.

It was the friction of flint and steel. The brush-heap was being set a-fire!

The sound soon ceased, and a faint glow became perceptible through the dense gloom. It gradually grew brighter and more vivid, accompanied by a sharp crackling as the sable flames licked up the dry, seasoned twigs.

The besieged kept up a vigilant watch upon what little space was not filled by the brush-heap, but it availed them naught. The incendiary had crept off under cover of the pile, and then his exultant yell told when he had gained the forest in safety.

The blaze now shot up higher until the interior of the cabin was brilliantly lighted up. The two men were forced away from the loopholes, which they closed with blocks of wood kept for the purpose.

They could do nothing now but await the result of this fiery ordeal.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACK PRINCESS.

FRANK BARNHAM was also destined to undergo some startling scenes and experiences before he rejoined his brother scout. They little dreamed of what was in store for them when they separated, or they might have thought twice before parting.

Barnham was brave and daring to a fault; too much so for his own good, perhaps. And then, too, he possessed no little degree of curiosity, which, if once fairly aroused, nothing how-
ever dangerous would deter him from endeavoring to satisfy it.

To offset this he had an inimitable nerve, united with great coolness and prompt decision. He was well skilled in the use of his weapons, and no novice in woodcraft, thanks to the teachings of his father and his uncle, Pete Shafer.

The trail he had selected to follow, led in a south-easterly

direction, and was evidently made by a huge Indian, if size of feet be a criterion. Alongside this, then, Barham strode with a rapidity that spoke well for the keenness of his vision.

For over two hours Frank kept on at the same swinging stride, the trail apparently not changing, neither older nor fresher. The sun was fast rolling toward the western horizon, and Barham began to fear he would not be enabled to overtake his quarry before dark, even if he did then.

Suddenly he uttered a little exclamation. The trail before him had abruptly changed its appearance. The paces were longer and the footmarks more deeply imprinted.

There could be only one explanation. The savage had become alarmed at something and had fled at the top of his speed. Only for a moment did Frank hesitate; then he also broke into a swift run.

His curiosity was strongly excited, and he would spare no pains to gratify it. He knew that this alarm could not be caused by his following the trail, as he was fully an hour behind; then what had startled the savage?

As he asked himself this question, it was speedily answered. Barham paused again, with a second cry of wonder.

Before him lay the deep imprints of another trail, almost covering that which he had been following. He glanced back along this before it struck the first one, at an acute angle, and saw that it had probably come from a range of hills a mile or more distant.

The young scout could not restrain a feeling of wonder as he gazed upon this trail. The size of the footprints, the enormous distance covered by the bounds, told him that no common man had left them.

The foot had evidently been clothed in moccasins, but the tracks lay in a straight line, from heel to toe; the latter turning neither in nor out. But despite the size—the length of the bounds, the last person did not sink as far into the moist earth as had the fleeing red-skin, whom Barham had first followed.

The former mystery was cleared up; the Indian had evidently noted some dreaded enemy, and had fled from him at full speed. But if one puzzle was solved, here was another to take its place.

Who was his pursuer? A pale-face or a red-man? A stranger at all events to Barham, for he could recall no man to memory possessing feet that would leave such tracks as those.

The young scout did not once think of the danger he might himself incur by thus trailing the unknown, in addition to the red-skin. He only knew that there was something strange beneath it all and that he would never rest until his curiosity was satisfied.

Giving one hasty glance at his rifle, Frank darted ahead, with increased speed, rendered doubly anxious by the fact that in two hours at furthest the sun would set. What he did must be accomplished before that time.

For several miles the chase continued. Barham had not the slightest difficulty in following the trail. The spoor was plain and distinct before him; so broad that the veriest novice in woodcraft would have experienced no difficulty in tracing it out.

The chase had been leading along near the base of a chain of hills, not more than two hundred yards from where the ground began to rise. Frank suddenly checked his speed.

He saw that he had reached the end of the chase, at least so far as one of the participants was concerned. Before him lay the silent and motionless body of a red-man; the skull that was turned toward the young hunter, gleamed red and ghastly in the beams of the setting sun.

Barham dropped behind a bush and peered keenly around the spot. He beheld nothing to confirm the suspicions that had entered his mind. But still unconvinced, he glided around the spot, keeping well screened, until finally he had completed the circuit of the spot of death.

He then arose to his feet, convinced there was no danger to be apprehended. He had crossed the trail of the big-footed slayer, leaving the scene of blood at a leisurely pace.

Frank advanced and stood beside the ghastly corpse. Despite himself an involuntary shudder ran through his frame. It was truly an uncomfortable sight.

The Indian had been slain outright, evidently at one blow. His skull was shattered like an egg-shell; the blood and brains bespattered the rocks and bushes for yards around the spot.

His arms and trinkets still remained upon his person or in his hands. Evidently the object of the slayer had not been robbery; it could only have been a vindictive revenge.

Barham aroused himself with a start. The glowing red disc of the sun, now nearly hidden behind the western horizon, caught his eye. In another half-hour it would be dark.

The knob where he had promised to meet Mart Shafer, loomed up behind him, fully half a dozen miles away. It would take him an hour's smart walking to regain it; and yet, knowing this, the young ranger turned his back upon the hill and strode rapidly away from the spot of death.

He did not vouchsafe one thought to what might be the feelings of Martin when he should miss his comrade. He had determined to solve the mystery that enshrouded this affair. He must find out who this big-footed stranger was, and where he abided.

The trail he had left was faint, but Frank was keen-eyed and deeply interested; he was not likely to fail from lack of proper precaution or judgment. He entered the hills and wound along a deep, narrow valley.

The trail led up the steep hillside, after a time, and here the last rays of the sun aided the young ranger. But then it suddenly died away. The sky became thickly overcast with dense masses of broken black clouds, that seemed to portend a storm.

With a growl of disgust, Barham paused, as he found he had wandered from the right trail. He gazed around him with increasing perplexity.

He was in a section of the country he had never before traversed, and he felt that he was lost. That, however, did not cause him any special uneasiness, beyond feeling that he would be compelled to await until daylight before rejoining his comrade.

When that came, he could easily make his way to the knob, as it could be seen for miles around. So with that philosophy he sat himself down upon a log, and, pocketing a few scraps of half-dried meat from his pouch, began munching them, not caring to build a fire, lest it should attract the attention of unwelcome neighbors.

Frank soon found this very dry fare, and began descending the hill, hoping to find some water at the bottom of the valley. He did not, however, at first, and then stumbled along through the darkness as best he might, hoping to meet with better success farther along the defile-like valley.

Then he abruptly paused, uttering a faint cry of wonder, all thoughts of thirst being effectually banished from his mind. A strange sound assailed his ears, coming from such a wild and unsettled section of the country.

There came to his ears, borne upon the light breeze, the soft, mellow notes of a flute, evidently played upon by no novice. And as he listened, it seemed that he could distinguish the low, sweet tones of a woman's voice, in accompaniment.

The young ranger stood perplexed and annoyed. It seemed like the work of enchantment. To hear such sweet sounds in a place like this—an almost unbroken wilderness, where the bloodthirsty savages and wild beasts disputed for supremacy—seemed little short of a miracle.

Frank soon shook off the incubus that fettered him, and intensely curious, stole softly up the valley toward the spot from whence proceeded the strange sounds. As he advanced, there could no longer be a doubt as to the correctness of his first surmise.

It was indeed the notes of a flute, played by one well skilled in the use of the instrument, and mingled with it was the voice of a woman; no such sound could issue from the throat of a man. But who were these strange beings? Despite himself, Baham connected them with the owner of the large footprint; of the mysterious slayer of the red man upon the plain below.

As he crept along the sounds became plainer and more distinct, and Frank knew he could not be far distant from the musicians, whoever they might chance to be, and yet he could not locate them exactly. There were no signs of a light or a habitation to be seen.

He now left the valley and began ascending up the steep hillside, the strange sounds apparently proceeding from about midway the ascent. He had now drawn so close that he could even distinguish the words of the song; but they were in a language of which he had no knowledge.

Then a faint light glimmered before his eyes, at only a few yards' distance. From its peculiar shimmer, Frank knew that it shone through a dense screen of leaves: hence he had not been able to discern it before.

Another minute of cautious creeping carried him beside the bushes, and then Barham paused to observe more critically the place he was in. Above him towered a rocky cliff, studded with vines and bushes. A dense growth of these were before him, seemingly hanging from the top of the cliff.

Through these shone the light, and sounded the musical strains. Below descended the rocky hill to the valley, then again arose a hill, much the same in appearance as the one he was then upon.

Barham pressed forward, and cautiously parting the screen of bushes, gazed spellbound upon the scene that lay before him. Truly it was a strange one; in perfect keeping with the music.

An excavation in the solid rock, of some twenty feet in diameter, nearly round, met his gaze. A rude lamp suspended from the roof, dimly lighted up the interior. The walls were thickly hung with various robes and skins, together with a goodly collection of fire-arms and other weapons, both offensive and defensive.

But these only received a cursory glance; a strange sight enchained the gaze of the young ranger.

Near the center of this room, upon a pile of skins and furs, were seated two persons. Two persons, male and female; man and woman.

One was that of an old man, if he be judged by the long, white hair that crept afar down over his shoulders. But his form betrayed no signs of decrepitude or feeble old age.

Never before had Barham gazed upon a more magnificent specimen of physical strength and symmetry.

Of a figure almost colossal, there was yet a perfect and just proportion that served to lessen the huge bulk. It seemed as though a giant of the olden time had returned to life, in this strange being. Frank no longer wondered at the size of the slayer's foot, nor at the length of his bounds.

But there was one thing that Frank noted with wonder greater than the rest. That was—the man was *black*—as black as polished ebony, and yet his features were regular, even classic in their mold. It did not seem possible that this man could be a negro.

The second person was a woman, young and marvelously beautiful, that even the brilliant black of her complexion did not detract from. She half reclined against the old man as he played the flute, her eyes closed, her lips parted to emit the low, soft and thrillingly sweet sounds that floated upon the air like nothing mortal.

The light of the lamp fully revealed her features, and Frank felt that he had never before beheld any thing half so enchanting as that sweet face. Perfect in all its details, there was the same classic regularity that marked those of the man, enhanced by a soft, half-voluptuous expression instead of the icy cold one that marked his face.

Her form was evidently exquisitely molded, although now only faintly revealed by the loose robe of crimson cloth, that was but confined at the throat by a simple knot of ribbon. Her hair swept down in luxuriant masses upon the rude skin dress of the old man, and mingled with his long flowing beard of snowy whiteness. One tiny foot, protruding below the dress, was encased in an embroidered moccasin.

All these details Barham drank in, like one in a dream of enchantment. He could not divest his mind of the idea that he was gazing upon something more than mortal.

A drowsy sensation stole over his senses, and he sunk slowly down upon his knees, still keeping his eyes riveted upon the marvelous vision. A soft humming seemed to fill his brain, and the two figures danced strangely before his eyes.

Had there not come a startling interruption at this juncture, there is no telling what indiscretion the bewildered young ranger might not have been guilty of. But his fast-fleeing senses were speedily brought back to their normal condition, by the peril that threatened not him alone, but the unconscious inmates of the cavern home.

It was a little thing to so suddenly arouse the scout from the trance-like state into which he had fallen; the clinking of a rifle or musket barrel striking against the rocky point of

some boulder. But it acted like magic upon Frank, and he instantly turned his eyes toward the point from whence had proceeded the sound.

The moon was shining brightly, having just emerged from behind a cloud, and its rays revealed to Barham the crouching forms of half a score dusky Indians creeping stealthily toward the spot where he stood. But he knew that game was the object of their quest.

He could not have been seen himself. The high cliff cast down by far too dense a shadow for that. Evidently the sounds of singing and the flute had attracted the attention of the Indians, who were now advancing to solve them eaning of such unusual doings.

Barham knew that his life also was in imminent peril, unless he chose to flee, and by sacrificing the strangers, thus preserve himself. But this he did not think twice of. He resolved to warn the inmates of the hill retreat of the impending danger, at all risks.

He arose from his knees, with the intention of stepping inside, when a dusky figure uprose nearly within arm's length of him, but a little below the ledge upon which he stood. The surprise was evidently mutual, for both gave vent to a little cry of wonder.

Barham flung up the muzzle of his rifle, and without attempting to take aim, fired its contents fall into the breast of the Indian. With a shrill yell of agony, the warrior sprang backward, falling among the rocks and bushes, writhing in his death throes.

"Say you—in there! The Indians are upon you!" yelled Frank, in a loud tone, as he darted to one side, lest the flash of his rifle should attract an unwelcome shot from the approaching Indians.

Scarcely had he done so, when several shots were fired, but the missiles only rebounded harmlessly from the face of the cliff near where the young scout had previously stood. At the same time Barham heard a shrill scream from within the cavity, and then the glimmering light suddenly disappeared.

Frank now realized the extent of the peril he had brought upon himself. He was hemmed in, and all chance of flight

cut off, unless indeed he chose to rush headlong through the ranks of the enemy, a feat that could hardly be other than fatal, owing to the rough ground. Their numbers were not less than a dozen, if indeed not more than that.

Barham heard nothing more from the cave occupants, and he believed they had fled by some means best known to themselves, leaving him to bear the rage of the enemy's onset, as best he might. Truly, his situation was not to be greatly envied.

Then there sounded the fierce war-whoop of the Sauk tribe, and the savages made a desperate rush up the hillside, toward the spot from whence had flashed forth the death-shot. Frank knew he could not escape discovery, and drawing his pistols, resolved to sell his life dearly.

When the enemy were within a half-score yards of his position, he leveled his arms and fired. Like an echo a sharp report rung out just above his head, and then, with a hoarse, roaring cry, a huge form sprung down from the cliff and dashed into the midst of the savages.

Barham uttered a shout, and, clutching his rifle, he also sprung forward. A brawny brave confronted him, and, as the heavy rifle descended, the Indian sprung nimbly aside, and the rifle-stock was shivered to atoms upon a boulder.

Then the foemen grappled in a struggle for life or death. Frank felt his knife hand covered with a gush of hot blood, but the exultant yell froze upon his lips as a burning pain shot through his side. Then a crushing blow seemed to alight upon his head, and with a heavy groan he sank backward, dragging with him the dead Indian, in whose heart was still sheathed the long hunting-knife.

Then all was still and dark ; a painless blank.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FORLORN HOPE.

THE besieged borderers awaited the result of the fiery ordeal in breathless suspense. The next few minutes were ones of horrible torture. Did the cabin only resist this assault, they were probably saved, as the brilliant light would scarcely fail to call forth a party from the Winnebago village, to learn its purport.

The heat was now intense, and beneath it the clay and moss chinking crackled and dropped out from between the logs, in tiny chunks. The brush-heap burned with a loud, angry roar, until it seemed as though the entire building was wrapped in flames; and as if to make the scene the more frightful, the exultant red-skins rent the air with their yells and hoots of triumph, doubtless momentarily expecting to hear the signal of submission.

But if so, they miscalculated the resolution of their anticipated prey. Knowing that death would inevitably follow, probably preceded by the most excruciating tortures that the devilish ingenuity of the savages could devise in case of capture, it only in revenge for the death of so many of their comrades, Black Pierre inwardly resolved to perish with the burning cabin, rather than surrender to them alive.

"The shanty is all a-fire, old man," muttered Smafer, in a low tone, his gaze wandering uneasily toward the pale but composed Mabel. "We'll be roasted alive like a 'possum in his hole!"

"If it must be so, then we will be as good as that same 'possum. We'll die in our holes without a cry for mercy," sternly returned Calmet. "But I don't think that yet. Look through the chinks. The brush is almost gone. The fools counted on the logs being seasoned, else they would have built a more substantial fire."

"The logs is a-fire!"

"Only the bark, I think. But we'll soon see," added the

ttler, in a hopeful tone, assumed more for the comfort of his children than from a belief in the truth of his assertion.

But such in reality proved to be the case. Beyond burning off the dry bark, and charring the outside of the logs, the fire had done nothing. The logs of white elm were too full of sap to burn unless subjected to a more severe trial than this had been.

The Indians made this discovery before the inmates could do so. And their yells of disappointment filled the air, carrying encouragement to the hearts of the besieged.

"What did I tell you, my boy?" triumphantly cried Black Pierre, as his face lighted up with joy and relief.

"You 's right so fur, but 'tain't over yit, not by a long chalk. Lis'en to *that*!"

The angry yells had completely died away, and now could be heard the quick, heavy strokes of hatchets in the neighboring woods. There could be no mistaking the meaning of this. The enemy were about to storm the building, aided by a battering-ram.

It must be this, for if they intended trying the fire once more, they would find plenty of seasoned wood upon the ground, without the trouble of cutting it. From the sound, they were cutting *green* wood now.

The door, already materially weakened by the fire, would soon give way, and then—there could be but one result. The besieged would be overpowered by mere force of numbers.

"It is what I feared!" muttered Black Pierre as he sunk into a chair.

"Don't gi' up yit, old man," cheerily cried Shafer. "They hain't got us yit. Mebbe they won't, nuther. I 'xpect the every tree 'll fall right down on top o' the hull caboodle o' the imp's an' kill every lambusted one! I do, by thunder!"

"No. They will finish it now," despairingly uttered the old man, as he covered his face with his hands. "I wouldn't care, only for the children. I'm old and of no account; it wouldn't matter for me—but them! My God! is there no way to save them?" and the father groaned heavily.

"Come, father, don't give way now, when you need all your energies," cried Mabel, springing to his side and embracing him. "They may not beat down the door, or if they do,

we may whip them yet. Besides, they may send in time from the village."

"You're right, Mab, as you always are. I am a fool. But I will not give way again. And if they do whip us we'll give 'em something to show for it!"

"Look here, old man," suddenly cried Shafer, "there's no door in this side o' the cabin. The rebs don't seem afraid o' us a-gittin' away thar. We kin fool 'em yit, I do nally believe?"

"How—what do you mean?"

"Jest this. Cut a hole in the ruff, drap down easy an' thin strike for the corn-field. Once in the woods an' the smartest red 'at ever wore ha'r couldn't catch us afore we got to the village o' your fri'nds."

"I can't—there is the boy—he is not able to walk, and we couldn't carry him," gloomily responded Black Pierre. "But you can go if you like."

"See here," angrily retorted Martin; "look at me. Air I a man, or air I a nigger? Do you see the pesky coward a-stickin' out anywhar about me? Ef you do, jest ketch holt an' pull it out. You make me mad, you do, durned if you don't. Git out! I killed a feller onct fer savin' less 'n that to me. Hit him in the face, I did. Smashed him out flat, too. Used to take his face when it got dried an' use it for a blanket, I'd made it out so big an' flat. Didn't think thet o' you, I didn't," and the scout turned away with an injured look upon his honest features.

"I didn't mean it, Shafer, really. I didn't know what I was saying. Forget it all, please."

"For my sake," added Mahel, softly.

Shafer tried to speak, but then turned away from the bright glance, a choking sensation working in his throat. He felt that for her sake he would gladly have dared certain death if by it she could derive any benefit.

"Look here, my fri'nd," he abruptly added, turning to Calmet. "You *must* go. You kin save *her*, 't any rate. Ef you stay, you on'y chance losin' *both*. Better hafe a loaf 'n no bread a-tall as pop used to tell me. It's risky, but it's worth tryin' anyhow."

"No, I will not go. I must stay with my boy. But if you

think there is a chance, do you go and take her. If you escape, you can send help from the village, or—if too late they can at least avenge us."

"I will not leave you, father," murmured Mabel, her spirit failing at the dread thoughts conjured up by his last words.

"You must—I believe there is a chance—a better one than in remaining here, at all events. You will go if I order you, Mab?"

"Do not—for God's sake, do not drive me away, father!"

"It is for your own good, darling. Our friend here will take good care of you. After all we may meet again, but I do not believe that one of us will ever live to behold the morning's light, unless we can get word to the village. That is our only hope now."

"I raily b'lieve he's right, miss," said Shafer, taking Mabel's hand. "You kin trust me. I would die a million times afore any thin' should hurt you in the teentiest bit."

The maiden did not reply, but bowed her head upon her hands and wept bitterly. The crack of a falling tree in the forest without, told them there was no time to lose.

"Let me stay here an' you go, instid," muttered Martin, in a low tone.

"No; I will not leave Justin, I tell you. We will live or die together."

"That is it—do not drive me away to die by myself," cried Mabel, passionately. "Let us stay together and meet the same fate!"

"No; that will not do. I would not sleep in my grave—if I ever receive one—unless I knew that those devils are punished for this. You must go and swear the kindred of your dead mother to avenge us. How else could they know who to look for? Black Hawk is cunning and would throw dust in their eyes. You must go and do your best. It is a duty, child," sternly added the father.

"Very well," and the voice of the maiden was calm and steady, as she arose to her feet. "I will do as you bid. If I do not fail, you shall be dearly avenged. I will devote my life to that one end."

"Good girl!" muttered Black Pierre, as he clasped her tightly to his broad breast.

But there was no time to be lost. The assault must come speedily, and while all the attention of the Indians was turned toward the one side of the house, the attempt must be made.

"You stay here and keep a close watch, Shafer, while I go up and cut the hole," said Calmet, as he rapidly mounted the rude ladder, leading up into the little loft.

"You ain't afeard to trust me, air you, Mabel?" asked Shafer, in a husky voice, as they stood side by side, peering out over the still glowing embers that marked the futile attempt to burn the cabin, toward the gloomy forest.

"No—I trust you," was the soft reply, and by some legerdemain, the hands of the young couple became intertwined, neither scarcely knowing how.

"I'm glad o' that, I am! I don't think you'll ever be sorry for it. I'd do a'most any thin' for you, Mabel. 'Tain't like 's ef we's strangers to each other. 'Pears like I'd knowed you a hundred years or more. I'd die ef you'd gi' me the—that is— *Durn* the smoke! It gits into my eyes an' 'most makes me cry!" disgustedly added Martin, brushing a sleeve across his face; but something more than smoke troubled his honest mind.

The sound of hatchet strokes had now ceased, and it was evident that the battering ram was prepared. The attack might be looked for at any moment now.

In a few minutes Black Pierre returned from his task and announced its completion.

"Mabel, go and bid your brother good-by; I wish to talk to Shafer," he added; then as they were left alone he resumed: "Do you know where the Winnebago village is?"

"No—but you kin tell me. You know this is my fast trip hereabouts."

"Well, it is about ten miles from here, on a line, but you must go a little roundabout. Mabel can show you. You must first go to the river where a big hill overlooks it. At the upper point of this hill, you will find a canoe hidden in the bushes. You must cross in this, as the river is too deep to ford. Then you must make the best of your way to the village, and give them this;" handing Martin a slip of buckskin covered with curious hieroglyphics. "They will know

you are from me, and will do just as you order. Leave Mab there, and hasten here at once. Don't lose a moment, for upon it may depend our lives. If they—if we are dead, why I will look to you that Black Hawk does not go unpunished. You will do this?"

"Yes—I sw'ar it!" solemnly replied Shafer.

"It is well. But now about Mabel. If we are killed, she will have no one to care for her but her mother's people, and they are not fit for that. She could never be contented there. Promise me that you will take her to your father. I know he will not let a child of mine want for a home."

"No more he won't. He's the beatenest feller for children as you ever see'd. Hain't got enough o' his own, so he tries to steal all 'at he kin lay hands on. No—that's a durned lie! Some on it, anyhow. But I can't talk straight now. I don't know—I wish I wasn't sech a pesky coward. I'd like to speak out flatfooted," stammered Shafer, fidgeting uneasily from one foot to another.

"You may never have another chance, my friend. Speak out. I think I can guess your thoughts," added Black Pierre.

"I will—if it kills me! Then I love your da'ter! That—it's out now!" and Martin agitatedly wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"I am glad of it, my boy—I am, truly. God knows she will soon need some such a friend, and I don't know any one to whom I would sooner give her than to you, for I believe you are honest and true-hearted. If she can learn to love you, you have my blessing, whether alive or dead."

"If she don't then 'twont be my fault. I hain't hafc good enough for her, but I'll do my best to make her happy. If I don't, then I'll eat my head!"

"Well, I believe you and trust you. But there is not time to say all I would like to. Those devils will not wait much longer before they make us a call, and you must be off from here before then, if you hope to do any good."

Mabel followed her parent up the rude ladder, weeping violently, for she—as indeed did all the others—felt that this was destined to be a last parting; that never again would they all be united here upon earth. But she had schooled herself to obey, knowing that it was all for the best.

A hole some three feet square had been cut in the roof, and this section of bark was now removed by Black Pierre. With one last hand-clasp, Shafer set forth upon his perilous mission.

He was to venture first, and if he succeeded in gaining the standing corn in safety, then Mabel was to follow. After this they were to hasten directly to the river, cross in the canoe, and make the best of their way to the Winnetago village. Then the rest was as Black Pierre had detailed.

Martin gently passed through the aperture, and hanging by his arms for a few moments, dropped lightly to the ground. Then his rifle was handed him, and crouching low down, he glided rapidly toward the standing corn.

Anxiously watched by his two friends from above, he gained the desired point in safety, and then uttered the agreed-upon signal—the chirp of a tree-frog.

From the opposite side of the clearing the young scout could distinguish weird, peculiar sounds that he knew denoted the Sauks were preparing for an onset. The hoarse hooting of owls, the yelping howl of wolves, the plaintive cry of the whippowill; all proceeding from human throats, in signaling.

Then Shafer beheld the slight form of Mabel being lowered from the aperture by the strong arms of Black Pierre, who dropped her gently to the ground. A moment afterward she stood beside the young scout.

"He says for us not to pause a single moment; to hasten at once to the hill," whispered the maiden, agitatedly.

Disobedience at such a moment could be productive of no good, and might work great harm. So the young hunter glided rapidly along through the corn, leading Mabel, heading toward the designated point, where they must cross the river. To gain this, they must pass through a dense and tangled tract of woods.

Black Pierre also had heard the signals, and readily interpreted them. He knew that but a few minutes would elapse ere the dreaded attack would come, and now that his daughter was gone, he did not seek to disguise the truth.

He felt almost certain that the assault would prove successful; that ere the two fugitives could even gain the wood he

would no longer be among the living. He had expressed a confidence he had not felt, the better to induce Mabel to flee.

He descended from the loft and prepared his weapons for use. There were three rifles; his own, Mabel's and that of his invalid son, who now lay in a sort of stupor, little knowing how near his sands of life had run out.

As he peered from the loop-hole, Black Pierre caught a momentary glimpse of a line of shadowy figures stealing silently toward the doomed cabin, and he knew that the critical moment was close at hand. With cold and sternly composed hands he leveled the rifle, and waited to make sure of his shot.

As the party came within a score yards of the building, they gave vent to a wild yell and dashed forward, directing the rudely-squared butt of the log they wielded against the door. Their cries were echoed back by a rifle-shot from the sturdy settler.

A bullet could scarcely fail of finding a victim in that densely-crowded mass, and as he dropped the rifle, catching up another, Calmet saw the assailants pause. One of their leading braves had fallen, and somewhat encumbered their advance.

A second shot with like effect, caused the log to drop heavily to the ground, but ere he could improve this advantage, the infuriated red-skins had caught up the battering-ram and hurled it with deadly force against the door. The first shock shook the entire building; the second cracked the planks in several places.

Again Black Pierre fired, and a third death-shriek rung out upon the air, far above the diabolical din; once more the log was hurled against the shattered door, and with such effect that great splinters were scattered about the floor.

The settler clenched his teeth and quickly recharged a rifle. As he drove the bullet home, the door was burst from its hinges and hurled across the room.

With shrill yells of ferocious triumph the savages swarmed into the building, led by Black Hawk. That worthy stumbled upon the threshold, and fell just in time to escape the bullet of the borderer, that passed on and lodged in the brain of a more unfortunate red-skin.

Then Black Pierre clubbed his rifle and dashed back the oncoming Indians. He fought with ferocious valor, for he thought of his disabled son, and of his fleeing daughter. A moment gained might prove his salvation.

He uttered a wild howl of fury. He saw that escape was hopeless; that death was inevitable, and he only thought of selling his life and the life of the dearly-beloved helpless one, as desperately as possible.

A score of paint-bedaubed, half-nude forms were pressing him hard. With hoarse words of anger, he dealt them furious blows with his clubbed rifle, until its stock broke.

Then he drew his knife and sprang into the *melee*. He bled from a score of wounds, but still he battled on, with undaunted bravery.

For a brief score of moments, there was a confused, terrific *melee*. The vicious thrusts and heavy cuts of the settler, fell fast and furious, dealing death and gaping wounds upon every hand.

It was a thrilling—horrible moment!

The gray-haired man battling singly for life, amid that hideous, demoniac crowd! But it could only be momentary.

A treacherous blow from behind felled him senseless to the ground. Then a score of thirsty weapons were uplifted to drink his heart's blood. They fell.

Black Pierre was dead!

CHAPTER V.

SURROUNDED BY DEATH

It was with wildly-beating hearts that the young couple, Mabel Calmet and Martin Shafer, turned away from the log cabin that had sheltered one of them for so long, endeared to her by a thousand associations of joy and pleasure, grief and trials.

Hand in hand they glided along through the corn-field and

gained the edge of the forest in safety. Nothing had been seen to alarm them, and all remained still in the vicinity of the cabin.

Mechanically they paused and hearkened. For a moment they could hear nothing save the usual sounds of a forest night. But ah, there came a sudden blow.

A series of direful sounds saluted their ears. Wild yells—a rifle-shot—a deep, sullen, thundering crash that told of the dread assault had begun upon the door.

Then another rifle shot—a shrill shriek of death—a united, blood curdling yell, followed by other crashings at the fated door.

“My God! they will be killed,” gasped Mabel, clutching her companion’s arm.

“No they won’t—they *can’t* do that. He’s too smart for that, I reckon. *They’ll* on’y git hurt—the pesky imps!” muttered Martin, uneasily, hoping to encourage his charge.

“Well—they are in the hands of God,” solemnly added Mabel, with a choking sob. “Come—he said we must not delay. We must save—or *avenge them!*”

“Right, Mabel; you’re right,” and turning, the fugitives glided on once more, toward the river, which Shafer traced to place behind them ere the foe could learn their escape.

Then there came a sudden change in the sound from the cabin. The blood turned cold in the young ranger’s veins as he realized the truth; that all was over—that the settlers had either been captured or killed by the Indians.

He felt the slight form quiver and then sink heavily upon his arm. Mabel, too, had divined the truth. She felt that now she was indeed alone in the world.

Martin heard the loud, angry yells of the savages, telling that their escape had been discovered, and knew that there was no time to be lost.

He caught the maiden up in his arms and dashed with long strides toward the haven of refuge. But then with a sudden start, Mabel sprung to her feet.

“No—I will walk. You must save your strength. I know the worst now, and I will be brave. Do not fear for me—I will be calm. I will do as he said—live for vengeance! Come—faster—oh! faster!”

Martin shuddered convulsively. A terrible fear assailed his mind—the fear that the maiden would go mad under this dreadful shock. But he was deceived. She was made of sterner metal than that. As she said, she would live for revenge, now!

But during her momentary swoon, Shafer had chosen the wrong path, in his ignorance of the route, and now Mabel did not discover the deviation. The moon was still obscured and the forest depths were very dark and gloomy.

For half an hour they pressed rapidly through the woods, Shafer's strong arm encircling the lithe waist of the maiden, and even then, in the dark trouble that so closely enshrouded them, the young scout felt a wild, delirious emotion of joy at the thought that now he was her only earthly protector; that he had a claim upon her, before all others.

His love had grown rapidly, but it was not evanescent. It was a passion that time would only augment and render more deep and fervent.

Then the bank of the deep, rapid river was reached, and a cry of agonized despair broke from the lips of the maiden. She perceived the error they had fallen into; very likely a fatal one.

"My God! we are lost! We are two miles above the canoe!"

"You don't—air you sure?" gasped the scout; but the apprehension he felt was more for the girl than himself.

"I know it—we must go down the river—there is no other way."

Hand in hand they turned and pressed downstream, feeling not their fatigue, only intent upon retrieving their error. But the time thus lost was invaluable.

In a half-hour, Mabel gave a little cry of joy. The hill loomed before them, dark and gloomy. They were near the spot where the canoe had been concealed, and yet there were no signs of the enemy. Could it be that they had not been followed, after all?

"Here are the bushes—come and help me take the—"

Mabel abruptly paused, with a cry of agony. The canoe was gone!

"Martin, the boat is gone," coldly added the maiden; but

there was an indescribable cadence of grief and apprehension in her tones.

"What shall we do then?"

"I don't know—stay here and die, I suppose. I don't see what else we can do," wearily responded the girl, sinking down upon the ground and covering her face with her hands.

"Not much we won't," cried Shafer, rousing himself. "But I can't swim over 'th you on my back, an' ef we stay here, we're gone, sure."

"Leave me, Martin—leave me and save yourself. *You* must not be taken. The dead cry out for vengeance, and you must not disappoint them," wildly cried the distracted girl.

"Go an' leave you? I ain't a nigger! We'll live or die together. I *couldn't* live 'thout *you*, now, Mabel," said Shafer, earnestly; but then adding in a more practical tone: "Come—help me roll this log over into the water. We'll float on it, an' trust the good Lord to help us free," hoping thus to rouse his companion.

Under their united strength the log was rolled down to the water's edge, and then Shafer turned to recover his rifle. At that instant a sharp report rung out—a bright flash from the opposite shore of the stream, and the peculiar hiss of a ragged bullet was heard as it passed close between the two fugitives.

They did not speak or move. The sudden and unexpected peril had transfixed them to the spot. Their gaze was turned toward the spot from whence the treacherous shot had been sped.

From this point darted out the faint, shadowy shape of a canoe, filled with human forms, heading directly toward the young couple. As if to dispel any doubt that they might otherwise have entertained, a long, shrill yell rung out from the boat.

It was the blood-curdling war-whoop of the Sanks!

An answering yell rung out upon the rear of the fugitives—another from their left. They were surrounded by their bloodthirsty foes!

Only one point remained open for them, and escape by

that direction seemed almost an impossibility. To the right uprose a high, precipitous hill, that the river had apparently cut in half, obliterating one section and leaving the other a rocky mass overhanging its waters.

This hill was thickly studded with boulders, and there were many a nook and cranny where a human form might lie concealed for a time. But alas! *only* for a time. The blood-hound-like red-skins could scarcely fail to remark them. But still, it was a chance, and though so faint and hopeless a one, the only remaining one.

"Come, Mabel," said Shafer, clutching his rifle desperately. "We must try the hill. Perhaps we can fool the pesky imp—'t any rate, it's our only chance now!"

The maiden did not reply in words, but, pale and trembling, she grasped the strong hand of the sturdy ranger with her cold and clammy one, and then they turned their faces toward the hill. She seemed entirely crushed by this new and unexpected blow.

The forest was now fairly ringing with the cries and signals of the savages, that were echoed back by those who were in the boat upon the river, now rapidly nearing the point where they had last beheld the fugitives. Evidently they considered the latter were irretrievably in their power.

The young couple were now half-way up the hill, and, pausing for breath, they glanced anxiously below them. A thrill of dismay agitated their frames as they beheld numerous lights gliding to and fro through the forest, borne by shadowy, phantom-like figures.

The truth was plain. Their trail was being followed by torch-light. This fact banished their last hope.

Aided thus the savages could scarcely fail to discover their victims, and then—!

Resistance would be useless, but yet the young man resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible, to fight until the last, in hopes of being rewarded by an instant death. A merciful boon, truly!

A few words will suffice to explain what might otherwise appear strange.

Black Hawk was indeed the leader of the savages who had attacked the settler's cabin, and, urged on by him, they had

finally succeeded in carrying it by storm. He found, to his intense disgust, that the prizes which he coveted above all else, had escaped him; the maiden whom he had decided should grace his lodge, and the daring young pale-face, who had disgraced him by an unrequited blow. For these he had incurred all the risk attendant upon a daylight attack, and he would not be foiled now.

Discovering the hole in the roof, he had no difficulty in divining the plans of the fugitives. His first move was to send off a few braves with instructions to gain the river and guard against the two crossing; the next was to confirm his suspicions by following their trail, aided by torch-light.

This was speedily under way, by a few, while others built a huge fire in the cabin, that threatened to soon complete its ruin. Then he set off along the trail, with blazing brands, resolved to neglect no chance of capturing the fugitives, passing the word that upon no account were they to be injured in person.

The party first dispatched reached the river in advance of the fugitives, owing to the deviation unconsciously made by Shafer; so that, if ruinous in one sense, this mistake was fortunate in another. But for it they would have been overtaken by the nimble-footed red-skins, and probably killed upon the spot.

While trailing along the banks for signs as to whether they were in time, the Indians stumbled upon the concealed canoe, and seeing their advantage, took possession of it. The better to guard the stream, the savages had crossed over to the further side, where, by the aid of the broken light, they commanded a view of the river's surface for a half-mile either side of their position, and could easily intercept the fugitives in case they should attempt to cross.

These were the ones who had fired the shot, thus giving a signal to the pursuers, as already detailed.

The despairing fugitives slowly retreated up the hill, knowing that any attempt at concealment would be in vain. The sleuthhound senses of the red-skins would speedily scent them out, and thus taken at a disadvantage, the young ranger could not hope to make much of a fight.

So step by step they retreated, glancing back at the will-o'-

the-wisp-like lights that flitted hither and yon, gradually but slowly closing in upon them. A net from which there was no escape.

The savages from the river had now landed, and joining their comrades, divulged what they had seen. The point where the log still lay was closely examined, and a cry of triumph went up as they found that their lost prey who had fled from the cabin were indeed the ones discovered.

And then, the better to cut off all retreat, the savages scattered and formed in a large semicircle, closely scrutinizing every brush and scrub where a human form could have possibly sought refuge. It was the torches borne by these that had filled the hearts of the two refugees with such apprehension.

"Martin," uttered Mabel, in a low, solemn tone, as they stood side by side some little distance below the crest of the hill, their figures blended with the dense obscurity cast by a towering boulder; "can we possibly escape? Is there no earthly hope for us? Tell me the truth, plainly. I can bear it."

"Thar' hain't so much hope as you could put in the corner o' your purty eye, 'thout makin' you wick, my pore darlin'," brokenly replied the young ranger, a choking sensation rising in his throat, more for her sake than his own, though life was very sweet.

"Can not you escape *alone*—without me?"

"No—an' ef I *could*, I wouldn't be so posky mean as to buy life thet a-way. 'Tain't my natur', it ain't. I'm a pore ign'ant feller what don't know much 'bout nothin', but I ain't one o' *that* sort. I'd like to live a little longer—I don't feel fit to die, but as it is, we'll hang together. I won't leave you."

"Then promise me one thing—swear that you will set me *free*—that you will not let me fall into the hands of that demon alive," earnestly added the maiden, her voice low and firm.

"I cain't—my God! gal, I cain't promise *that*. I kill you—my hand shed your blood? No—no!" faltered Shafer, his strong frame shuddering with horror.

"It would be a mercy; I would bless you for it. Better an instant death than a life of lingering torture as the slave of

some savage or viler white man. Martin, promise me that you will perform this duty?"

"I can't—my hand would drap like a dead stick ef I tried to—my heart would bu'st!"

"Then give me one of your pistols. It will not be the first time I have used one like it. You *must*—either give me it or else promise me what I prayed," firmly added Mabel, disengaging one of the pistols from the scout's belt, and holding it in her hand, ready for use.

"See! they're comin' up the hill!" muttered Martin, pointing down at the slowly advancing lights. "Ten minutes more 'll end it all!"

"You will not give in, tamely?"

"Nary time. Ef the pesky imps want my skelp, they must 'arn it fust. But I'll fool 'em yit, see 'f I don't. That is so far as takin' my ha'r's consarned. I don't think I could rest easy ef my top-knot wasn't in its right place, an' it'd be mighty uncomfortable, runnin' around loose like, as a ghost. But I'd do it, fer sure, ef they tuck my wig," muttered Martin, half-unconsciously, his eyes still riveted upon the torches.

"Hain't we better go further up? At the top of the hill they can not surround us. They must attack in front and expose themselves fully. Besides, if the worst must come, better a leap over the precipice than capture by such devils!"

"That is jist what I was thinkin' o' doin'. We'll make one lick for revenge, an' then gi' them the go by that a-way. Come, le's go up."

The hunted refugees turned and stealthily glided up the hillside, using every care and precaution to avoid alarming their foes, who might end all by a sudden volley, did they learn the exact whereabouts of their victims. Up they climbed until the hill's crest was gained, and here they knelt down behind a large boulder sufficiently high to cover all their forms, by crouching, save their heads.

Then Shafer prepared his weapons, knowing that the life and death struggle could not long be delayed.

Moment after moment passed, and then they could distinguish the faint echo of footsteps, with the slipping of some moccasin upon the loose rocks and gravel. And, peering

over their breastwork, they could presently discern the faint, shadowy figures bearing lighted torches.

But this was only for a moment; then, at a peculiar signal, the lights were all extinguished. With wild yells the savages sprung forward.

The course of the young ranger was decided in a moment. He sprung upright and leveled his rifle at the foremost savage; but he did not fire. Instead, he raised his voice and called out:

"Halt! Ef ye come one step further, I'll plug ye! Is thar any imp among ye who kin understand my words?"

"Yes, Black Hawk is here," replied a clear, full tone, that Shafer had no difficulty in recognizing. "What do you wish?"

"Tell your braves to stop. I want to see ef we cain't come to some sort o' tarms. I reckon you'd rather hev us alive than dead, wouldn't ye? 'specially the gal."

"Is the squaw with you?"

"Yas—he is here," slowly replied Shafer.

"Well, then, you shall have your will," and Black Hawk said a few words to his braves in their own tongue. "Now speak. The ears of a great chief are open to what the long hunter has to say," the savage added in a loud, clear tone.

"You think we air in your power, don't ye? Wal, ef so, you're mightily fooled, *you* be. We've got the whip-hand o' you yit. One little leap over yander, an' what'll you find? Not much. A grease-spot, mebbe. No pris'ners to tortur', anyhow. An' that is jest what we'll do, ef you press us," firmly declared Martin.

"Jump over there—you would die before you touched the water!"

"I know that. A easy death to the one you'd give us. But that doesn't matter now. Tell me what you did 'th the old man an' boy down yander?"

"They—they are prisoners," hesitated Black Hawk.

"I b'lieve you lie, but come out an' show your face. I kin tell better by it," added Martin, trying in vain to catch a glimpse of the renegade chief, his sole object in asking the parley.

"Martin," whispered Mabel, "look yonder to your left! There is an Indian crawling up to take you by surprise!"

The renegade chief also had an object in thus dallying with his victims. He knew—or at least feared—that the scout's threat would be put into execution, and he thus be robbed of his double revenge.

He had sworn to torture Shafer for the bitter blow the young ranger had dealt him, and to have Mabel grace his lodge as his squaw. He had sent several of his braves around to gain a point from whence they could spring out upon Martin and speedily overcome him, before this act could be executed.

It was one of these men that Mabel's quick eye had detected, just as he was gliding across an open space.

Martin only hesitated for a moment, and then, seeing that he could not obtain a shot at the renegade, he leaped down from the boulder, and with a quick, accurate aim, discharged his rifle at the foremost savage.

A thrilling death-yell followed, and, seeing their ruse discovered, the Indians bounded forward with wild hoots and yells of triumphant exultation. The young borderer dropped his rifle, and, with leveled pistol, coolly picked off a second foe.

With ferocious yells, the red-skins rushed on and poured over the boulder. One clutched Mabel by the hair, but with a quick motion she raised her pistol and shot him through the brain.

As he fell at her feet, Martin bounded to her side. He dashed away one—two foemen who interposed, and then, raising her in his strong arms, sprang to the edge of the precipice. Then, with a shout of defiance, he leaped far out over the dizzy depths!

One shrill shriek uprose, and then came a dull, heavy plunge in the turbid water of the river. The savages stood aghast at this desperate act.

Then, despite their rage and chagrin, a low murmur of admiration ran through the crowd. It was an involuntary tribute of respect to a brave and daring foe.

Then they thronged to the brink and peered downward. The moon rolled from beneath a broken cloud; one moment of light, then all was dark again.

CHAPTER VI.

TRAILING A GIANT.

"CORN-TWIST thet pesky 'Riah, why don't he come?"

These words were uttered by a man whose skin, though deeply tanned and seamed by not a few wrinkles, and long sandy hair, beard and mustache, proclaimed the pale-face. Though earnest, this exclamation was almost inaudible; quite so at a yard distant.

His was a peculiar-looking face and form; one that soon would not be easily forgotten. Tall, angular and bony; strong, active and supple. His eyes bluish-gray, his nose curved like the beak of an eagle, his mouth wide and stained with tobacco-juice. Garbed in a serviceable suit of buckskin and woollen, he bore the usual weapons of the western borderer.

Some of our readers may have met him before; Peter Shafer, sometimes called "Lying Pete," for short, the father of our young scout, Martin.

He was seated upon the butt of a good-sized limb that jutted out horizontally from a huge oak tree, some four or five yards from the ground. His keen eyes were moving restlessly around him, now threading the long wooded ridges, or else scanning the wide expanse of prairie-like clearing, upon whose edge the tree stood.

That he was ill at ease, could be readily perceived, from the varying expressions of his eyes and countenance. According to a habit—gained by long and solitary journeys—he occasionally uttered his thoughts aloud though seemingly unconscious of so doing.

"This is the place, an' I'm here, but he hain't, dog on him. A-nour a'ter time, too, purty nigh. Darn sech a liar, I say. Jest wait—I'll fix 'im! Ef I don't, then it won't matter."

"I wonder ef *he* found out any thin'. I did—didn't I? Bet yer life! I found a track—an' *sech* a track! Go 'way, elephant—you hain't got no aidge on *this* feller. Lord! talk 'bout a fut—why ef the track 'at I see'd hed on'y 'a' bin a blanket, durned ef I couldn't 'a' laid down on it an' tucked it up all around me. Ef I couldn't, why I wouldn't say so. Ge-lery! what a scroudger the feller what navigated them toad-squashers must 'a' bin! Wonder ef he could turn 'round 'thout steppin' on his own heels?"

For some moments the ranger was silent, gazing anxiously around him, as if in quest of some person or thing. Then he resumed:

"Wonder whar the boys is? They must be some'rs nigh to here. 'T any rate, they was sent out this a-way. Like to see the leetle cusses, jest for fun. Wonder how many times they's got killed? Get eout—you Pete Shater! you're a fool! Git killed? Lord! man, thar hain't a redskin hatched as is smart enough to rub *them* fellers out—nary time; not much.

"Kill Mart? Ef he'd be *sech* a pesky fool as thet, I'd sw'ar he's no 'lation o' mine; an' I guess he is. Anyhow, Lucy says he is, an' she'd orter know ef anybody. Sometimes I do, an' then ag'in I don't—think he's mine, I mean. 'Ca'so why, he cain't *lie worth a cent!* The time I've spent in teachin' thet boy—he's learn me a-plenty to l'arn—but he don't 'prove much, ef any. 'Pears like the talunt's sorter runnin' out o' the fambly. Pore dad—I'm thankful 'at he didn't live to see this time!" and the weather-beaten scout sighed heavily as though at some great calamity.

Suddenly his restless eyes became fixed and motionless. Through an opening in the thickly-clustering branches, he had caught a glimpse of a human figure gliding rapidly along over the plain, in a manner, skirting the forest.

Gradually the look of pleasure upon his homely features gave way to one of doubt and perplexity. The approaching figure was not that of the one whom he was expecting or for whom he was waiting.

"'Tain't 'Riah—'less he's a stan'in' on top o' his lf. Too tall—jee-rusalem pancakes! what a waste o' stuff! 'Nough thar to make hafe a dozent decent-sized fellers—like *me*. Talk 'bout Goliath—thet feller is big 'nough to be his gröt

gran'daddy! He was growed out o' doors, he was, I bet a cookie!"

The figure still advanced, and as it came nearer, the huge bulk and hight still further excited the wonder of our scout. It was truly a man such as is seen only once in a lifetime.

"Lord! don't I wish I's that feller? Woul'n't I make a spec outen it? I'd go hire out at the Fort as a flag pole—if I didn't, then it don't matter. Wonder what sort o' weather it is up thar, whar his head is? Bet he hes to take off his hat whenever he walks under the moon. Knocks the stars every which way, I don't wonder. Kin straddle across the river I reckon, an' not more 'n hafe try. Look at them feet—oh! *git* out!"

The gigantic stranger strode swiftly on, passing within a hundred yards of the tree where Shafer was perched, glancing keenly upon either side, his massive features wearing an anxious expression, though partially concealed by the slouched hat and long white beard.

"A nigger, by gum!" muttered Pete, as the stranger passed by. "Or mebbe a white burned black. Shouldn't wonder a mite, his head 's so clust to the sun. Bet that's it. Wonder who he is? Did he grow out here? Be thar any more whar he came from, sech as *he* is? Durned ef I don't find out. I'll ketch the pesky critter an' tote him back home. Make a show o' him—I will, by hokey!"

The lank scout nimbly descended from his perch and then glided swiftly along through the forest, keeping close to the verge, but still thoroughly concealed from view of any person out in the clear ground. He had totally forgotten what he was waiting for, in wondering who and what the gigantic stranger might be.

Had any one asked Pete what he contemplated doing, he probably would have been nonplused. He had no fixed idea or plan of action.

An hour before, he had crossed a trail evidently made by a human being, though a day old, but yet with such large feet that he scarce could believe his eyes. Now, however, he thought he had found a clue to the mystery. This man was the owner of the feet that had left the spear.

Pete ran along through the forest at a rapid rate, but with

a silence truly wonderful. He could gain occasional glimpses of the open ground, and presently saw that he was nearly abreast of the giant.

Now he measured his pace by that of the stranger, and thus they proceeded for nearly a mile. Shafer saw that the giant was heading for the now near hills, and he became more excited, for there he hoped for a chance to discover who and what the black man really was.

Several times he noted the giant stoop and pluck some weeds or herbs, and then proceed as before. Then the mouth of a deep, valley-like depression that seemed to entirely divide the high hills, was reached, and without hesitation the stranger entered this.

For a minute Shafer was undecided. He knew not what lay beyond, and left that should this man prove an enemy, a collision could scarcely fail to end disastrously to himself.

Then he left the trees and cautiously glided toward the defile, holding his rifle in readiness for instant use, in case it should be needed. As he entered his eyes sought in vain for the stranger. Not a living form was to be seen!

And yet, though it seemed so to the scout, there was nothing strange in this sudden disappearance. There were a hundred spots where the giant could have hidden from view, had he felt so inclined, or had he suspected he was being followed.

"Dog-on the pesky imp!" muttered Pete, disgustedly, as he withdrew behind a huge boulder standing hard by. "But he knowed I's follerin' him all the time. Mad, too, I guess. 'D like to swallow me whole, mebber. Big a-plenty, anyhow. Pete, you're a fool—a nat'ral born, darn fool! What business is't o' yours who he is or whar he's a-goin'? Git rubbed out some o' these days, you will, a-actin' sick-like. Then how'd you like that, eh, I guess not?"

For a few moments the ranger remained motionless as the rock behind which he stood, his keen gray eyes roving restlessly around him, taking in every detail of the wild and broken scene. He saw nothing of life—of human life—though a huge, grout gray wolf might have been seen sinking through the valley, now and then lifting aloft its sharp howl and uttering a long-drawn yelping howl.

Then, as if reassured, Shafer emerged from his covert and slowly glided along the defile, keenly searching for some signs by which to trace the giant black. Suddenly he paused with an involuntary exclamation.

A ghastly sight lay before him, one that might well cause the most hardened to shrink back in momentary dismay. One that told of death—of the raging of fearful passions—of human strife.

Before him lay the mangled remains of several human beings, the white, glistening bones clean picked and polished, dismembered and scattered hither and yon. Around them lay torn and blood-stained fragments of clothing, an unstrung bow, a musket, the separated stock and barrel of a rifle.

The old scout read the truth as if by instinct. There had been a struggle for life, and the victims had been left to the tender mercies of those scavengers, the wolves.

Pete stood leaning upon his long rifle, his eyes fixed regretfully upon the ghastly heap. A half-mournful light filled his gray eyes, and he seemed far different from the reckless, devil-may-care ranger he usually appeared.

But then a wild cry—half-stifled though it was—broke from his lips. A cry of agonized apprehension—a cry telling of some great fear. His gaze became riveted upon the broken rifle.

His head craned forward, his eyes protruding wildly. Great drops of perspiration stood coldly out upon his brow where the swollen veins rose like knotted whip-cord. Then a bitter groan broke from his pallid lips as he sprang—or rather tottered—forward and knelt beside that tell-tale, the broken rifle.

He raised it in his hands and turned it over. There could be no mistaking it. He knew every screw and mark about it. He knew that he held the rifle of young Frank Barham in his hands.

Then where was its owner? Was he alive or dead? A bitter groan broke from the trembling lips of the strong ranger as his eyes dwelt upon the heap of gleaming bones that lay around him.

"Pore Frank—pore 'Rich!" muttered Pete, as one hand mechanically caressed the broken and blood-stained rifle.

"A sad cend to it all! Who'd 'a' thunk it? The young fellers tuck an' us old no-count birds left. It'll c'ena'most kill Miry—she sot a heap by the lad. Good boy was Frank—only he couldn't lie. 'Twan't in him; like his dad, thet a-way. Mart could beat him all holler *thar*, anyhow.

"The leetle cuss—gone an' got rubbed out! Orter knowed better, though. What's the use? Don't do no good, as I sees on. What's a feller when he's dead? No 'count fer nothin'. An' 'Riah—Lord! how thet feller 'll cuss! Won't know which cend's up, *he* won't. Take on dretful, I 'spose. Make the far fly, too, he will, ef he finds out who did it. Awful when he gits mad, 'Riah is. Soon chaw a feller up 's nat, he would. An' so would I, too!"

The old scout bowed his head upon his hands, and sat in silence. The blow had been a bitter one. He believed that his young nephew—almost son—was dead; that his remains lay before him mingling with the others forming that ghastly heap of fleshless bones.

He loved the boy quite as dearly as he did his own son, Martin. The shock could scarcely have been greater. Whimsical words issued from his lips, but they were none the less heartfelt. They were spoken unconsciously.

A dark vision conjured itself up before the eyes of the scout-ranger. He saw the mother—the father of the young scout, proud and happy that they possessed such a noble son. The love that bound them together—this their first-born—was deep and holy.

What then would be their feelings when they learned of his frightful death? Stafer feared the worst. He feared lest the blow should prove fatal to the loving mother.

"Poor Miry! it'll 'bout kill her, this will. Dog-on it all, w'en warn't he smarter? What'd he git knocked over fer? No, 'a' 'a' knowed better'n thet. I thought better o' you. I did indeed, Franky!" he asked, mournfully, as his gaze rested upon the white bones that bore the deep marks of teeth where the ravenous scavengers had gnawed them.

The gray wolf stole forth from the bushes and stood glaring upon this guardian of the dead. A deadly, fiendish glow shined from its eyes, and with lips drawn back, the long white fangs showed themselves in what seemed a diabolical grin. Then,

foot by foot, it glided nearer, with brief pauses, while its red tongue greedily licked its lips.

"Whar's Mart?" suddenly exclaimed Pete, as he roused up, "whar's the boy? He wouldn't leave Frank this a-way. They war like a young couple what hed just got married; you couldn't keep 'em apart ef you tried your darnedest! Like the two ends o' a piece o' Injun-rubber string, they war. Pull 'em apart an' they'd flap right back jest's soon's you'd let go. *Then whar's Mart?*" he slowly added, as he arose to his feet, a new fear expressed in his eyes.

The wolf uttered a low, fierce growl and shrunk back, crouching low down, its cruel fangs glittering ominously, its eyes fixed upon the tall form of the hunter. And a quick change came over the man, too.

He noted the blood-stained chops of the brute and divined the truth. This beast, perhaps, had assisted in destroying the body of his nephew. A wild, fierce glow of anger filled his breast, and the long rifle sprang to his shoulder.

But then it was lowered, even as the double sights drew full upon one of the gleaming eyes. A rifle-shot would be dangerous here, now that he knew the enemy had been nigh, so lately.

Instead, Shafer drew his knife; a long, heavy one, home-made, from a file. This he grasped in one hand, the blade lying along his inner arm.

A quick motion—a bright flashing as the heavy steel shot through the sunlight—and then a wild, howling yelp of death agony, as the huge brute rolled over the ground, tearing convulsively at the dirt and gravel in its last throes, the long blade buried to its very hilt in the hairy throat.

Shafer leaped forward and spurned the quivering carcass with one foot as he withdrew the knife. A look of stern joy irradiated his features.

"So much for you, darn ye!" he muttered, vindictively. "An' jest so I'll carve those as ratted out the young feller at last, ef so be I kin ever git on thar track. I'll do it, ef it takes a lifetime. I won't go back on my word, neither. I swar the death hunt on 'em, one an' all! I'll—"

He abruptly paused and turned around. A strange sight caught his keen eye. He gazed in wild astonishment for a

moment, and then sunk to the ground, gliding rapidly yet noiselessly toward a large boulder.

Once there he peered forth upon the spectacle. Truly, it was a strange one, for that time and place!

CHAPTER VII.

WATER-CRAFT.

Down—down through the thin air sped the forms of the hunted fugitives; down—down through what seemed an immense space; down until it seemed as though the very breath would leave their bodies, and the peculiar sensation wrung a wild shriek from the lips of the maiden.

Then with a heavy, sullen plunge, they entered the cold and chilling water. Down—down they sunk, until their feet touched the hard, sandy bottom. Around them reared the turbid water, here dashed by a strong eddy against the rocky face of the cliff, breaking into frothy foam that clung to the jagged points of rock, that reared their slimy crests above the surface, hither and yon, over the river's expanse.

Martin, half stunned by the great fall, still clung firmly to the form of the senseless girl, who lay a dead weight upon his arm. He struck out desperately, but something seemed to prevent his rising to the surface.

He felt the water dash him against the rough rocks, and then—he breathed the pure, fresh air once more! With a choking sob, he inhaled great draughts of the element, and raised the head of his lifeless burden above the water.

All was dark—intensely dark around him. He ducked the swimming hair from his eyes and glanced around. Not a ray of light met his gaze!

He swam strongly forward; but only for a moment. Then his outstretched hand struck against the rocks. Turning he swam back.

The result was the same. To the right; he was checked there. And then with a cry of despairing wonder, he turned

to the left. Once more was his progress checked by the hard, firm rocks.

The cold water chilled his limbs, and the clothes of both himself and Mabel, now completely saturated, weighed him down heavily. He allowed his feet to drop down, but found the bottom was beyond his depth.

This effort drew his head beneath the surface, and nearly strangled him. It seemed as though nothing but death awaited him—and with him, the one who had already become dearer to his heart than even his own life.

Despairingly Martin groped around the rocks, in search of some projecting point, by aid of which he might at least protract the struggle. He had almost given up all hope of escaping with life, one peril trod so fast upon another's heels.

A low, gurgling cry broke from his half-submerged lips—a cry of joy. His hand rested upon what seemed the edge of a long, shelf-like projection.

From his position Shafer could only reach over this some few inches, but his finger-tips failed to touch the back of it. He believed that it was amply broad enough to support their forms, with proper precautions.

He essayed to raise Mabel up on it, but the task was beyond his strength, owing to his peculiar position. Still, with one hand he could easily support himself and her head above water until she should gain consciousness, and thus be able to assist him.

In a few moments the maiden uttered a faint sigh, and half raised her head. With a low, glad cry Martin spoke to her and bade her fear not; that the danger had in part passed.

"Never fear, Mabel; we'll git clear yit, though 'twas a narrow shave—the good Lord be thanked fer carryin' us through it this fur!"

"Where are we?" she slowly uttered, gazing around her in wondering dismay.

"I don't know—some place, I reckon. Looks like it, anyhow, only it don't nuther. That is it would of 'twas n't so pesky dark. Ugh! every time I open my mouth it gits so full I kin sca'ce'y shut it ag'in—o' the dark, I mean," muttered Martin, disgustedly.

"It is cold—so cold here!"

"I should remark it *was*—a *little*. But see—thar is a sorter shelf, like, here, thet'll be better ef so be you kin git upon it. Look—I'll hold ont'er it an' you must climb up me—sorter make a ladder out o' me. Think ye kin do it, eh?"

"I'll try."

Mabel soon comprehended the situation, and, assisted by Martin, was speedily ensconced upon the ledge, which proved amply wide enough to support her comfortably, and was some yards in length. Then Martin drew himself up beside her, and they both listened intently, to learn if possible the movements of their foe.

The same thought occurred to both. The enemy would assuredly search for them—in hope of at least securing the coveted scalps, for that frightful leap could scarcely be taken by one and result otherwise than fatally—and might they not ferret out this hiding-place?

Neither knew of what nature it was, but Martin soon determined to find out, and slipping from the shelf, he began groping cautiously about. He speedily returned to report.

It seems that the strong eddying current had sucked them up against the cliff, near the bottom. On touching the rocky face, Shafer had risen up until upon the surface. By so doing, he had come up between two masses of rock, one the main cliff, the other a sort of cave-like projection that came down to within several feet of the river's bottom, consequently being as many yards below the surface of the water.

Up into this curious sort of cavity the two refugees had risen, and now a solid wall of rock intervened between them and their pursuers.

Scarcely had Martin announced this discovery than his keen ears distinguished the faint muffled sounds of splashing water and human voices, without. Evidently the savages were at work, searching for their intended victims, whether dead or alive.

A new fear assailed Martin. He knew that the Indians were swimming around, hunting for dead bodies. Might not they dive and grope along the bottom for them? And if so, why might not the subtle eddy serve one or more of them as it had the refugees—suck them up into the cavity?

As this idea struck Shafer he drew his knife and held

it in readiness for use. It was the only weapon he had now.

By this time the eyes of the refugees were in a measure accustomed to the peculiar gloom, that now seemed less intense than before. Above their heads close scrutiny could just discern several tiny cravens, through which a faint shimmer of light descended, showing that the mists had once more broken from the clouds.

The fears of Shafer proved well founded. The treacherous ally indeed played the trick he had foreseen, and the first intimation he had of this fact, was a sudden puffing and blowing as a huge savage rose to the surface within arm's length of the ledge, half strangled and suffocated from want of breath.

Prompt and speedy action alone could save them now. Was the Indian allowed to depart, unharmed, he would more than likely make known his discovery, and the quick-witted red men would speedily reason out the truth—or at least search there for the dead bodies of their victims.

Without a word Martin sprang down upon the foeman, with knife clatched firmly in one hand. He grasped the red-skin's throat, the more surely to check all outcry, but the sudden onset hurried them both beneath the surface ere a word could be uttered, or a shout of alarm given. Then with nervous fury Shafer pressed the long-bladed knife home to its very haft once, twice in the broad chest of the writhing red-skin.

Taken by surprise and at such a fatal disadvantage, that unfortunate could only offer the slightest resistance, and died almost before he knew his danger. Then Shafer, still holding to his prey, lest it should drift out from the cavity and thus betray the presence of mortal foe, by the ghastly knife-wounds, struck out strongly for the surface.

He felt the rocky wall and rose beside it, until the welcome breath of clear, pure air met him. But an involuntary cry of dismay escaped his lips, as a clear bright light met his eyes.

He saw that he had committed a grievous error—that *he had arisen outside the cavity, and was in the very midst of his foes!*

In the surprise Shafer dropped hold of the dead savage

and sunk beneath the surface. His first thought was to rejoin his young friend, and if discovered by means of this unfortunate mistake, defend her to the last.

But the treacherous eddy again played him false. It had swept him along more than he had calculated, and as he groped blindly along down the rocky wall, Martin could not find the entrance. First to one side and then the other, he groped, but in vain; and then he was forced to rise to the surface from want of breath.

As he did so, above the ringing in his ears, Martin heard the still yells of wondering dismay that announced some great calamity, proceeding from the red skins. *They had discovered the dead body of their comrade!*

Shafer was still in the dense shadow cast by the towering cliff, though not far beyond he could see the broad belt of moonlight, rendering the river's surface nearly as bright as daylight. In it he could see the thickly-clustering heads of savages swimming to a common center, evidently surrounding the dead body that had slipped from his grasp.

Beyond this again, and apparently moored to a rock, he could discern a canoe; only one end of which was in view—the rest hidden behind the black rock. A sudden gleam of hope filled the mind of the young ranger.

Could he succeed in reaching this, he might possibly steal off with it during the confusion, and then, hiding it, manage to rejoin Mabel, after which they could depend upon some safe mode of crossing the river, after the first fury of the gust had subsided. Once in it, even if seen by the enemy, they could bid them defiance, as a sufficient start could be gained to enable them to reach the Winnebago village in safety, before being overtaken.

With one of Shafer's disposition to think was to act, and choosing his course, he swam swiftly until the edge of the shadow was reached, and then, calculating his distance, he dove for a rock whose top was some feet above the surface of the river. True to his intention one hand touched the boulder, and he arose for air.

In the darkness here, he could see that the dead Indian was being towed to the shore, in order that the cause of his death might be investigated.

Martin now swam openly toward the canoe, feeling that even if observed, he would most probably be mistaken for one of their own party by the Indians, and thus escape discovery. But now a new difficulty presented itself.

As he advanced further, Martin saw that the boat was occupied; that one Indian was seated in it, holding it to the rock. For a moment the scout hesitated, but then one glance at the distant savages showed him that he might never again have such a favorable chance, and he resolved to trust all to one blow.

Noiselessly he floated on, holding the fatal knife ready for use, barely allowing his nose and mouth to appear above the water. The current carried him directly toward the object of his wishes.

Then he turned over and backed water. The savage was sitting still, all unsuspecting of danger, with face turned toward his companions, who had by this time gained the bank, and were gathered around their slain comrade.

There was no time to be lost, and as he gained the side of the boat, Martin outstretched one hand, his sinewy fingers closing like a vice about the brawny neck of the red-skin, and then the right arm hissed through the air, burying the heavy blade deep in the back of the red-man. The blow was deadly, and it needed not a second one.

But, the stricken man uttered a hoarse, gurgling yell of death agony as he was pulled over the side of the boat, that met the ears of his friends. A wild cry broke from them, as also one from high above—from the crest of the precipice, from whence rung out several sharp reports, accompanied by the spiteful spat of the bullets as they flattened upon the water, all around the head of the daring scout.

Martin noted those upon the shore plunge back into the water and begin swimming rapidly toward him, and knew that it would be worse than folly on his part to await their coming. Against such numbers he could hope to do nothing; death or capture—its equivalent—would be inevitable.

He only hesitated whether or not to retreat to the cavity where he had left Mabel, but then he saw that such a course would be fatal. The quest would be kept up until he was unearthed, and then the fate of both would be sealed.

On the other hand, did he flee from the spot, chase would be given, and all thoughts of the maiden cast aside, in trying to effect his capture. Then, did he escape, he could return, after throwing them off the scent, and rescue her.

But should he be killed or captured? what would become of her? The thought was too horrible. He banished this fear, and bent all his energies toward escape.

The canoe had floated several yards away, impelled by the current and the waves made by the momentary struggles of the stricken savage, and toward it Shafer swam, putting into play his utmost skill and power.

The rifle-shots from the hill above still rung out, and the bullets pattered heavily around him, but the moonlight was deceptive, and the elevation caused the majority to overshoot the mark; so that the scout passed through the leaden hail unscathed.

Reaching the canoe Martin adroitly drew himself in at the stern, and clatched the paddle that lay upon the bottom. He also noted a rifle, evidently that of the slain red-skin, lying beside it.

As he gained this position, Shafer glanced back at his enemies with a shout of wild defiance, that caused the woods to reverberate back the startling echoes. He saw the dark heads of the Indian swimmers rapidly approaching, and grasping up the rifle, he discharged its contents at the foremost; then, without pausing to note its effect, he grasped the paddle anew, and swiftly impelled the canoe toward the further shore, at the same time heading down-stream.

He had two motives in this, one was to gain a start; the other was to deceive the Indians and put them upon a false scent.

The further shore lay in dense shadow, for some yards out from the water. Martin intended striking this, and then, turning abruptly upstream, paddle to a safe distance above the landing, he would cross over and conceal the boat. After this he would return to where he had left Mabel.

He hoped thus to fool the enemy into thinking he had fled at once, and at the same time ensure the means of a safe retreat for the maiden, as soon as a move by her was deemed prudent.

The swimmers were not more than one-third of the way across the river when Shafer entered the mass of shadows, and then he turned the prow of his boat up-stream. The current was only moderate at this point, its main force being directed toward the other shore, owing to the abrupt bend above the hill, and so the scout was enabled to proceed at a rapid rate, but still evincing not a little skill in paddling so noiselessly.

He had passed abreast of the hill before the pursuing relatives gained the shore, and a grim smile swept athwart his features as he heard the loud yell, followed by another and yet another, each one sounding more distant, for he knew by this that the foe were searching for him *down-stream*, as he had intended they should.

"Let 'em yelp, the pesky fools!" he muttered, as he plied the paddle with long, steady strokes. "Runnin' water leaves no trail an' ef they keeps it up fer ten minutes longer, they kin go shake themselves fer all o' me. Then I'll be all right."

The bend above the hill was now reached, and Martin resolved to risk a crossing, preferring to run some risk rather than lose any more time. The thought of Mabel's suspense urged him to this.

He had disappeared so suddenly and in such a startling manner that she could have no means of knowing whether or no he was yet among the living? Ignorant of her whereabouts and helpless to aid herself, she must suffer agonizing torture with every moment that passed.

Martin paddled swiftly across the river, his form quite distinctly revealed by the clear moonlight, had any eye been turned in that direction. But this must be chanced.

As he neared the bank Shafer suddenly ceased paddling, and lay at full length upon the bottom of the boat. He knew that sufficient impetus had been given the canoe to carry it to the shore, and by thus acting the danger of being picked off by a treacherous shot would be greatly lessened. Then with a slight jar the prow touched shore.

No sound followed, and rising, Martin stepped out upon land. A quick glance showed him a dense growth of bushes overhanging the water, and here he speedily had the canoe

concealed so that more than a cursory search would be necessary to unearth it, unless one was posted as to its whereabouts.

Then he entered the water and waded silently down-stream, toward the mill. In a few moments he stood at the point where the rocky bank began to rise into the hill, and then he allowed himself to float quietly along with the current, keenly scanning for some signs of the curious cavity. For a time he was at fault.

Then he dove down and began searching for the spot. Nothing rewarded his quest. Again and again he dove, but with the same result.

But at the fourth trial he found the desired object, and with a sensation of wild delight, he arose within the cavity. A cry of pleasure broke from his lips.

"Mabel, darling, don't be skeered—its on'y me—Mart, you know," he murmured, as he paused lest he should alarm the maiden and cause her to utter a cry that might prove dangerous to their safety.

No answer. All was still as death, save the gentle, murmuring ripple of the water, and his own subdued breathing.

A strange fear assailed his mind. He dreaded—he scarce knew what. It seemed as though some great calamity was about to befall him.

"Mabel—Mabel, why don't ye speak?" and his voice trembled with apprehension.

Still no answer. With a wild, groaning cry he plunged forward and grasped the shelf. He groped along it with his hand. He felt nothing but the cold, damp rock.

Where was Mabel Calmet?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REFUGEE'S HOME.

"THIN all was still and dark—a painless blank!"

Thus we left our young friend, Frank Batham, surrounded by enemies, in a bitter struggle for life and death. He lay there as he had fallen, across a dead foe, while the conflict raged with desperate fury.

But this was only momentary. The surviving red skins did not relish the appearance of their new enemy, and shrunk back from before an arm that seemed endowed with more than mortal strength and skill. They had not counted upon this.

The giant raged like a demon of vengeance. In his hand the huge ax seemed a plaything—but one that dealt death at every blow. He seemed to bear a charmed life.

The chief of the red men—himself no child—confronted the giant and struck a vicious blow with a keen and well tempered knife, fast at the heart of his adversary. The blade snapped in twain like an icicle, and the giant laughed wildly as the ponderous ax was whirled aloft, descending like a meteor, fell upon the shaven crest of the savage, shattering it like a gourd.

A shrill yell of horror and affright went up as the braves noted their leader's fall, and as with one accord the survivors turned and fled, leaving their dead and disabled as they lay, thinking only of putting a safe distance between themselves and this dread slayer, whom mortal arms seemed powerless to harm. A hoarse, contemptuous laugh followed them, as the giant wiped the drops of perspiration from his heated brow.

"Father—are you safe?" called out a clear, sweet voice from the wall above, in a tone of anxiety and alarm.

"Yes, Camilla, yes. Hand me down a light, and then go back. This is no scene for you to gaze upon. Hasten! I fear the stranger is dead!"

The maiden did as directed, so far as procuring the light, but then lingered at the alcove like ledge, gazing curiously down

upon the scene of death. The giant moved slowly around until the rays of the lamp fell upon the pale features of the young scout.

Kneeling beside him, the black carefully examined the body, in silence. A severe wound upon the head, evidently inflicted by a tomahawk, a broken arm—the right one—was the sum total, with the exception of a few trifling bruises.

"Is he alive, father—will he die?" murmured Camilla, agitated, for the features—handsome, despite the bloodstains—of the youth impressed her strangely.

"Yes—no. He will live, I think. But take the light, since you are here, and show me the way. His wounds must be attended to, and he would die if left out here in this damp, raw air."

"Will you take him in—you remember—" hesitated the young woman, in surprise.

"Yes—but he saved our lives at the risk of his own. Such a heart will not betray our confidence. But I could almost wish he had not spoken," added the giant, gloomily.

"Father!"

"Hold the light—don't talk. We must act, instead," slowly spoke the black; and then lifting the youth tenderly, he carefully soled the raw steps, and bowing, entered the narrow passage that led to the chamber where Braham had first beheld the two strange beings.

From that chamber led the way to a second passage, that was hardly wide enough to admit the bulky person of the giant, with his bow, at several places, ending finally in another chamber, lined up even more luxuriously than the other, in the same style of barbaric splendor. Here the giant deposited the young scout upon a soft couch of furs and skins, and then, after rolling a large boulder to bar the entrance, he set about attending to the wounds.

With tender hands and no mean degree of skill, he set the fractured arm, and neatly bandaged it. Then the hurt upon Frank's head was looked to.

Fortunately the blow had either been partially eluded or else fully absorbed, and only a severe scalp wound was the consequence. The skull had not been injured, so far as he could tell.

This duty attended to, the recluse then emerged, and dragging the bodies of the slain savages down the hill, he cast them into the valley. The broken and useless weapons were also thrown there; the serviceable ones he carried to the cave, to be added to the already extensive armory.

Returning, he bade Camilla seek her couch, while he composed himself to watch beside the wounded youth. For ever an hour the young scout did not stir, still remaining in a death-like stupor, only breathing faintly.

But then he opened his eyes and stared wildly around him, as if in doubt whether he was yet alive or no. This only lasted for a moment; then his head dropped back, and he sunk into a deep and peaceful slumber that lasted until daylight, though a lamp was kept burning continually, the light of the outer world never penetrating there.

Then as Camilla called to announce breakfast, the giant arose and left the room. The meal was partaken of in silence, with the exception of a very few words at first, concerning the patient. Both appeared far from being at ease.

After a time the father bade Camilla watch beside the wounded youth, as he would be absent for a time. After he had emerged from the cave, the maiden sought the inner chamber where was the invalid.

Seated upon a couch at a little distance, she watched the pale, handsome features, with curious eyes. Presently Frank showed signs of waking, and then essayed to arise.

Camilla ran to the couch and gently pressed him back. Frank uttered a little cry of wondering dismay as he found he had not strength sufficient to resist even the weight of this tiny hand.

"Who are you—where am I—what has happened?" he muttered, brokenly, as his eyes roved vacantly around the room, returning to the strangely dark face that bent over him.

"Think—don't you remember? You called out to save us last night, and then there was a fight—you were hurt; don't you recollect now?"

"Yes, I believe I do, partly. I heard music, I saw an angel playing a guitar—"

"Angels do not have black faces," retorted Camilla with a roguish smile.

"This one did, at any rate," persisted Frank, with an audacity that surprised himself. "The Indians were creeping up—she was in danger, and so I called out. Then—I don't remember much that followed—until now."

"You were hurt, but the Indians were defeated. Then you were brought in here, and—you know the rest."

"Who brought me? Not your—"

"Yes, my father. But you must not talk so much. It will make you worse. Your arm is broken and your head is badly hurt. You must be still and not think, even; only sleep, or dream."

"If you will talk for me, I will not say a word. If you don't, then I will keep on until you must answer me," half-laughed Frank, his eyes resting admiringly upon the ebony-hued face, so beautiful despite its color, that hovered over him.

"I will not; unless you are quiet and obedient, I shall have to leave you alone, by yourself," retorted Camilla, with a half-offended toss of the head.

"Then sit down there, where I can look at you, please?"

Confused by his eager gaze, the maiden retreated to the couch, and to cover her discomposure, picked up the guitar and began idly touching the strings. For a time Frank gazed upon her in wonderment.

What was such a person doing here in the wilderness? One, too, who had been brought up far differently, quite evidently, whose language and voice bespoke more than ordinary culture and refinement. She touched the strings with the hand of a master, and then, as her voice rose in soft, sweet notes, Frank closed his eyes and listened in dreamy repose.

When the music died away, he glanced up and saw that the fair player had evidently believed him asleep, and had withdrawn from the apartment. And then, pondering deeply, Frank indeed fell asleep.

It was a little after midday when the giant returned, and immediately visited her patient. He expressed himself as well satisfied with the progress made, and declared that he apprehended no serious illness; the only delay would be waiting for the fractured bone to knit again.

"Come, Camilla," said the father, "though you must forego your walk to-day, you must take a breath of fresh air. My

darling must not fade and grow thin now that she has become a sick-nurse. Bring your guitar and we will have a duet, up at our old favorite look-out. Come!"

Together the strange couple emerged from the cave, and clambering up the hill under cover of the underbrush and vines, soon gained a broad, bare rock, crowning the extreme crest of the hill, where they rested themselves side by side, and then took up an old and beautiful hymn, playing in perfect time and accord.

Suddenly Camilla paused and outstretching one arm, the hand pointing down hill, she exclaimed in a tone of alarm:

"Look! father—look yonder!"

CHAPTER IX.

FROM GRIEF TO JOY.

PETE SHAFER peered forth from his covert in wondering amazement. Truly it was a strange sight that met his gaze, when time and place were taken into consideration.

The low, soft notes of a flute, accompanied by a guitar, met his ears and diverted his gaze. Looking upward he beheld two forms seated out in full view; two forms, one a man, the other a woman. They were the black giant and his child.

"Lord! hev mercy on us pore critters!" muttered Pete, as he gained his covert unperceived. "Just look at that! Did you ever see the like in all your blamed days? No, I never, and I don't! Just listen! O! I go 'way better an' jesser—ye hadn't got no aid on *them* critters! The big fellow had his foot on 'em—but they's spots! Packed out on them spots—*that* one was a '29, an' the other—Lord! darnd! I make a white mark on *them*!"

"Who is they, anyhow? Darned if I know—only wish 'at I did. Just fer fun. Look like mighty nice people, anyhow. Good mind to go up an' see 'em. An'—Thunder! I clean forgot pore Frank!" and a dark cloud closed the eager

look of curiosity from the sunembrowned countenance of the old scout.

"What 're they doin' *here*, so clus to whar he was, an' takin' things so pesky cool fer? Wonder e—no, I don't think dat. An' git, he's a nigger! I'm goin' up an' see ef they kin tell me any thin' 'bout it—durned ef I *don't*, anyhow!" muttered the old scout, resolutely, as he arose from his crouch, with a quick glance to see if his rifle was in condition for use, and then strode rapidly but silently up the hill.

It was the sight of his tall form approaching that drew the exclamation from the lips of Camilla, as recorded in our last chapter.

Pete saw the giant rouse up, and glance sternly toward him, and instinctively paused. There was something so imposing in that grand form reared aloft, with the strong contrast afforded by the snowy beard and jetty skin, that the scout, despite himself, experienced a sensation something akin to awe.

"Hello thar! you, mister man, don't git skeered—it's on'y jest me!" called out Pete, as the black made a move as though he would descend from the perch.

"And who are you?" demanded the other, as he spoke a word to Camilla, who instantly glided down through the bushes and disappeared from view.

"Jest me—that's all. But I'm a fri'nd or a enemy, jest as you may say. If you're honest an' a fri'nd to white men I'm a fri'nd—of not, then not," boldly added Shafer, advancing toward the black.

"Stop! what is it you want with me?"

"Jest this. I want to ax you a question. Thar was a fellow rubbed out here o' late, an' I want to know what sort o' kind you had in the affair. Take keer how you answer, 'cause I'm apt to be kinder keerless how I act when I git mad. Jest sort o' life over, then. Mought' scald you, then, mebbe."

At this moment Camilla ran out beside her father, holding his rifle, and then, as he grasped the weapon, the black giant added:

"Now I can meet you on equal terms. Speak out plainly, so that I may know whether to treat you as friend or foe?"

"Good! you're my man—thet's *my* style. Then here goes. Thar was a young feller killed here awhile ago. Kin you tell me how it kem about?"

"I do not know of any *white* man being killed here," was the calm reply, "was he a friend of yours?"

"He was my nephwy; I guess he was a fri'nd. 'Pears thet a-way, anyhow. Knowed him from a pip, I did. Telled him all I knowed, 'most; all 'cept how to lie. Thet was the little cuss. Couln't git so's to twist his mouth round 'em, like Mart could. Yas—he was a fri'nd," abruptly added Szafer, brushing one hand across his eyes.

"How do you know he was killed?"

"I see'd his bones, an' his broken rifle, down yander."

"Those are the bones of Indians. Your nephew was not killed."

"What? not—oh! git out! You're lyin' now. Don't I know better? Didn't I snivel over those bones; an' would I bawl over those o' a pesky red-skin? Not much—jest say thet ar'in!" spluttered Pete, supporting himself upon his gun and trembling violently.

"He was not killed—he is in our home, alive and safe, though badly wounded. He saved our lives, and so I cared for him."

"In your—whar, whar? Dog-on ye, why don't ye tell me *whar*? Good Lord! why can't the pesky cuss speak out?" and Pete danced frantically from one foot to the other.

"You must promise me one thing first. Never to breathe to mortal being the secret of my abode, unless I give you permission. Will you promise?"

"Yas—Lord, yas, all you ax. Cross my heart if I don't—so help me John Henry!" "Tell me whar Frank is, 'cos you want me to bu'st right to onct!"

"Come up the hill, then, and I will show you. I think I can trust you. Your face is an honest one," and the refugee began descending the path toward the cave entrance.

"Pears whar I axed you—he says my face is a lie, 'cos I'm ester'n my tongue. Yas, you kin trust me—any thar, jest so's you show me the boy. You ain't lyin', now, be ye? 'Caise of ye be, better order your wooden overcoat to onct, ~~for~~ you'll need it!"

"No, I tell you the truth. Come in."

Trembling from excess of joy, Pete trod close upon the heels of his guide, not vouchsafing a second glance at the curious dwelling. He had only thoughts for the lad whom he had deemed as dead, but who was alive, and so near him.

"Here he is," uttered the black, passing at the entrance of the inner chamber. "See! he is asleep."

With a wild cry of joy Shafer sprang forward before the stranger could arrest him, and knelt beside the couch. Frank opened his eyes with a start, but as he recognized the honest features of the scout, a glad cry broke from his lips.

"Frank—Frank—you kettle cuss—you pesky critter, you! Speak to me—say you ain't dead! Dog-on it, be you dumb? Caint you say *yes*?" spluttered the ranger, as he eagerly pressed the well hand of the youth.

"Of course I'm alive—don't you see?" laughed Barham. "But how did you find me?"

"Oh, go-long! *Git* out—he's alive! he sais so hisself! Held me, somebody, or I'll bu'st! Hurrah fer hooray," yelled Pete, springing to his feet and breaking into a regular "bear-dance."

"Is the man crazy?" cried the black, as he stepped before Camilla.

"No, I ain't crazy—yas I *am*, too, ef *you* say so. Call me a liar an' I won't keer. Say somethin', do, please. Just cuss me a little, won't ye? Sorter step on my corn—pinch me—pull my ha'r—punch me in the snoot—do somethin' to make me mad, so's I kin say I forgive ye! Gi' me your hand, stranger, an' you, too, Miss Stranger. Let me say how dy. I'll be your nig—yer *white* nig—er, I mean, ef you'll let me. Tell me to *do* somethin'—somethin' *hard*, do! If you say so I'll just punch a hole thro' the moon, an' bring it to ye for a grin'stone. Or I'll go swing a whcen o' stus fer ye to wher 'round your neck, miss, ef so you gi' the wick. Anythin'—*burned* ef I *don't*, now, 'cause why—you saved *him*—that pesky kettle imp yonder," and Shafer fairly broke down and sobbed aloud, while great tears trickled down over his grizzled beard.

"It was but just—he saved our lives," said the giant, affected by the simple joy of the scout.

"Uncle Pete," interrupted Frank "where's father?"

"Some's nigh. We was out on a scout an' separated to hunt fer sign. I found this man's track an' follered him on-til I found your gun 'long o' a heap o' bones down yander, an' like a pesky fool, thought *they* was your'n, too. Oh, *don't* I wish you was wed—that's all! He—*he*? I give it to you for this—you ornery dickens, you! Won't I harp you, you little spegger—oh! no, I guess not! I'm mad to you, I am. Lord! yas, reckon I *am*! Could I fly, I'm so mad. Seem like I could jest swaller myself whole. Oh! but you'll catch it! Ain't you skeered, honey?"

"A little," wearily replied Frank, the excitement proving too much for him in his weak state.

"Come, my friend," said the host, "you must leave him to sleep now. He is weak and needs rest."

"Just so—nought 'a' knowed it! Darned fool, I am, anyhow. Hain't got no sense, no more; not enough to scratch myself when I catches," dismally muttered Pete, as he turned to follow the black, with a last affectionate glance at the young scout.

"Be seated," and the giant nodded toward a pile of skins. Then in a few words he detailed the events of the past night. Still he seemed greatly perturbed; a fact that did not escape the keen eyes of the scout, who, however, deemed it best to await the farther speech of his strange host, lest he should touch upon unpleasant subjects.

"You have not told me your name, nor your purpose here," at length added the black.

"My name's Pete Shafer, an' I'm out on a scout for the whites aginst Black Hawk's redskins. That boy in yonder is my nephew, the son of my old chum 'Rich' Braham. That is the whole story."

At this moment Camille uttered a little shriek, and ran away from the entrance of the cave which she had been standing in. At the same time there sounded the clear notes of several rattles, mingled with wild yells, from the valley below.

"By thunder! that's the voice of 'Rich's shooter!" exclaimed Pete, as he sprang toward the entrance.

A thrilling scene met their gaze.

Near the foot of the hill, and retreating toward their pos-

ition, was the form of a single white man, who was adroitly loading his rifle as he fell back. At perhaps a hundred yards distance were the forms of a number of Indians, who were pressing hotly forward with shrill yells of rage and exultation. Behind them a few yards lay the body of one of their number, still writhing in the agonies of death, telling plainly that the hunter had not wasted his shot.

Sinifer's ears had not deceived him. The fugitive—if such he could be called—was indeed none other than our old acquaintance, Uriah Barham, the father of the wounded youth now lying within the cave chamber.

"What are you going to do?" asked the black, as Peto stepped from the chamber.

"Goin' down there to help my fri'n', in co'se!"

"But you will only get killed!"

"'Nd so 'll he ef I don't."

"You can not save him."

"See here, stranger, I'm a white man. He is my friend, yer'ser. He's in trouble an' I must help him out, or else go under with him. I've promised you not to tell nobody o' this hole; so what else kin I do?"

"Good! I see you are honest, and so must he be, or he would not be your friend. But you must not go—call him in here. We can hunt them off, easily. Besides, I suspect they were after me when they found him. I killed some of their tribe last night, and the others would naturally seek revenge. Call him up here," he hastily uttered the word.

"May I? Bully for you—you're a trump, just air!"

Peto then uttered a single call—the shrill, peculiar whistle of the Red Hawk; but it was unheeded. It was a signal often used by the two scouts, and it told Barham that his friend was at hand.

The white man, glancing around and catching sight of Peto's hand as it waved through the bushes, and he rushed in, calling out his name. Then he fixed the one who had fired, his rifle once more ready for use.

They had not passed to recharge their firearms, such as had fallen—but instantly commenced upon overhauling the white man by a rapid rush. But they soon saw their error.

Barham threw up his gun. It remained level for one instant,

and then the sharp, spiteful crack was mingled with a wild yell of death agony as the leading red-skin flung up his arms and fell backward, shot through the brain.

Then Barham dashed up the hill toward the spot where he noted the waving hand, closely pursued by the infuriated redskins. But they were destined to meet with a sudden check.

Two reports rung out as one, and, sped by the hands of men who seldom missed their aim, as many bullets tore their victims. Bewildered, the Indians faltered, and then, for a moment, sought cover behind the numerous boulders, while Barham clambered up the rocks, guided by the voice of Sinder.

Then the two comrades clasped hands in heartiest, but silent congratulation.

CHAPTER X.

AFLOAT AND ASHORE.

"MABEL—Mabel!" cried Martin, in an agony of apprehension; but no answering voice came to relieve his fears.

Despairingly he sunk back, but the cold water choking him, again roused his senses. With a painfully throbbing heart he grasped the ledge and drew himself upon it. As he did so, a wild cry broke from his lips.

His hand touched something cold and clammy. He felt again, and—could it be? Yes! *Mabel was lying at full length along the shelf!*

Then why did not she answer? Could she be sleeping? No, for had it been ever so sound, his voice would have aroused her. Then was she—fearful thought!—was she dead?

Martin bent over her and touched her cheek. It was cold and like marble. One hand sought her heart—it was not there—or if so, so faintly that his trembling hand failed to detect the fact.

Wildly he clasped her hands and pressed his lips passionately to her cold and lifeless features. He called to her in frenzied tones to awaken—to come back to life—to him. But no answering pressure—no voice replied to his appeals.

Then he sunk back in mute despair. It seemed as though every thing bright and dear in life had vanished. His heart felt like a laden weight within his breast.

Suddenly he started. A faint sound—like the sobbing of a gentle breeze among the tree-tops—came to his ears. He listened; it was repeated. And then with a gasping cry of joy he bowed his head over the form of the maiden.

He felt a gentle breath play upon his lips—there was a coming warmth. He felt her heart throb faintly—oh! so faintly, and scarcely dared breathe, lest even that should extinguish the feeble spark of life.

The joy, the fear, the agonizing suspense of those few moments, could never be expressed upon paper. It was a trial such as, fortunately, few are called upon to bear more than once in this world.

Then as the moments fled by, the maiden slowly awakened from her swoon—for it was nothing more—and as she realized her protector was once more with her, the recovery soon became complete.

When she had—waiting for the reappearance of Shafer, after his abrupt onset upon the intruding red skin—heard the wild yells and rifle-shots from without, Mabel feared the worst. Then as the moments passed by and Martin did not return, the worst seemed confirmed.

Believing she was now utterly alone in the world, without one earthly protector, and in a position from whence she could not hope to escape unaided, where she might be doomed to die a frightful death by starvation with only the terrible alternative of suicide as an escape, Mabel's overtasked nature had given way, and she sunk into a death-like swoon.

Martin hurriedly narrated his adventures, and then detailed the plan he had formed, for their future actions as soon as it was deemed prudent to make a move. He believed the enemy were now completely baffled, and that they would speedily give over the quest, or at least remove so far that his project might be carried out without serious danger.

For a time the young couple—thus strangely placed—sat in silence, buried in deep thought. But then Martin felt the form beside him tremble, and he heard the faint sounds of low sobbing.

"Cheer up, Mabel," he said, soothingly, as one arm stole around the maiden's waist, the darkness rendering him wonderfully courageous. "Don't take on so; we'll fool the poky iumps yit—never fear."

"It is not that—but my—my father and poor brother! Dead—dead!" and the sobs grew more bitter.

"Mebbe not; that teller said they was pris'ners, you know," muttered Shafer, but his heart belied the hope his tongue expressed.

"No—they are dead—murdered—I know it! I am alone—all alone in the world now!"

"No, not quite alone. I'm with you—an' ef I do say it, Mabel, you'd never be 'lowed to want fer life or sup' while I live. I didn't mean to say it so plain, just now, 'cause we don't know jistly whether 'ither o' us 'll ever git clear from this hobble, but I love you. Yas, I do love you, with ~~that~~ such feelin', I reckon, as a feller'd enter feel fer the one he litches to fer life. 'Pears like I couldn't live 'bout you now though I hain't knowed you fer so very long ef you count up the hours. An' then the old man—your pap—he said that you must look to us now, fer fri'nds. I told him that you shed find a hum 'th us as lon' as you'd like to stay; an' and an' mam 'll say the same, with thank 'ee into the bargain. So don't think you hain't got no fri'nds nor nothin', 'cause you ~~has~~," earnestly uttered the young scout.

The maiden did not reply, and though he longed for an answer, Martin feared to say more. But the seed he had dropped was not wasted; it had already begun to take root.

Nearly an hour was thus passed, when Martin decided that the time had come for them to make the venture, fearing to await longer lest daybreak should surprise them before the river was crossed. He knew that with the first rays of dawn, the red skins would be scouring the woods for sign, in order to learn whether the daring pale-face had gone, who had stolen the boat from under their very eyes.

Shafer dove down through the opening, and arising without, took a close and careful survey of the river and shore, but without seeing any thing to arouse his suspicions. Then he returned once more to the anxiously-waiting maiden.

"Now, Mabel, think you kin stand it? We must dive

down through that hole, an' then, onct outside, swim a little ways, until we kin climb up the bank. Kin you do it?"

"With your help—yes," bravely responded the maiden.

"Good! give me your hand, an' don't git skeered. Trust me to take you through all right," cheerily added Mart.

Then side by side they sank down into the cold water, and in another moment emerged upon the other side of the "cave." Then, supported by Martin, Mabel floated along by his side, in silence.

A very few moments—so rapid was the current—sufficed to bring the fugitives to a point where the bank could be scaled, and then, hastily wringing their dripping garments, they entered the woods. A circuit of the hill had to be made in order to gain the canoe, and great caution was necessary, for it was far from unlikely that some of the red-skins were still prowling about the vicinity, and one false step might ruin all.

However, nothing of the kind occurred, and the bushes that overhung the canoe were soon reached. Then Martin, assisting Mabel to a seat, grasped the paddle and sent the boat rapidly up-stream, keeping within the line of dense shadows cast by the neighboring trees.

When the hill was nearly shut out from view, he turned the canoe toward the farther shore, and plied the paddle with increased vigor. The sky was now unclouded and the moon shone down brilliantly upon the tranquil water.

The river was two-thirds crossed when a sharp, spiteful crack was heard from the shore just left, and the leaden bullet whistled by so close that its vicious hum was quite distinctly heard. Then came a loud shout—another and another, and the woods fairly echoed with the frightful sounds.

Martin bent to the paddle with desperate energy as the reports rang out more frequently, heaving now up, now down—men, the latter to elude the death missiles, that cast the water in spray upon every side of them. Then the boat touched shore and Mabel cried out:

"Jump, Mabel—jump now! We must run for it now!"

With an agile leap the maiden alighted upon firm ground, where she was quickly joined by Martin, who then cast the

down through that hole, an' then, onct outside, swim a little ways, until we kin climb up the bank. Kin you do it?"

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The river was two-thirds crossed when a sharp, spiteful crack was heard from the shore just left, and the leaden bullet whistled by so close that its vicious hum was quite distinctly heard. Then came a loud shout—another and another, and the woods fairly echoed with the frightful sounds.

Martin bent to the paddle with desperate energy as the reports now came more frequently, heaving now up, now down—men, the latter to elude the death missiles, that cast the water in spray upon every side of them. Then the boat touched shore and Mabel cried out:

"Jump, Mabel—jump now! We must run for it now!"

With an agile leap the maiden alighted upon firm ground, where she was quickly joined by Martin, who then cast the

boat adrift, knowing that by so doing he would delay the enemy more than had he let it lie, as they would now be obliged to swim further for it. He saw that a number of them had already entered the water and were approaching, holding their rifles above their heads to guard against their getting wet.

"Come, gal, we must travel like fun, now!" Shafer muttered, as he wound one arm around Mabel's waist, and dashed away from the river, with long, rapid strides.

"To the village?" she gasped.

"For a time—yas. But they'd soon overhaul us that a-way. We must double on the jumps soon. Jest go far enough this a-way to make 'em think we're goin' to try a straight, tail-on-eend chase."

There was nothing further said, for breath was too precious and the traveling too difficult to allow of it. Straight on they pressed, running as rapidly as was practicable through such a waste.

Behind them they could occasionally hear the faint yelling of their foes, announcing that their trail had been struck. Shafer knew that some, if not all of the Indians, would rush on at full speed, hoping to overtake the fugitives before the village was reached, without much thought of the trail, that could not be kept unless by torchlight.

So feeling that Mabel was illy fitted to cope with the trained and nimble-footed warriors in such a race, he had determined to "double" upon them, and trust to his own skill and woodcraft to carry them safely through by daylight, that was now not far distant. This he felt was their only chance, and so shot off at an abrupt angle to their left, still maintaining the killing pace.

For full half a mile he sped on, but then warned by the painful panting of Mabel and the trembling of her slight frame, he slackened down to a rapid walk. Now that he had passed beyond the reach of his foes, even did they spread out to guard against such a ruse, he turned once more in a diagonal direction that would carry them near the village, if maintained.

Martin tenderly supported the faltering footsteps of his charge, and with low, cheering words, endeavored to lighten

her spirits, but with poor success. A dreadful vision was ever before her eyes.

She saw the dead and mangled forms of her father and her brother, lying weltering in their gore. She felt that she was alone in the world, and caught herself wishing that she also might die. Life seemed utterly worthless now, and she even wondered why she should take such pains and undergo such trials, merely to preserve it.

Thus they wandered on, Shafer guiding their course by occasional glimpses of a bright star, feeling confident that he could not be going far astray, for he had closely questioned Mabel as to the whereabouts of the village. Still he was anxious, and longed for the coming of the new day, although with it might also come the threatening peril. For he knew that the enemy would not abandon the search while there remained the faintest ray of hope.

The light grew brighter in the east, and the last star dimmed and then died away from sight; and still the refugees pressed on uncomplainingly, though scarcely able to drag one foot after the other.

"Look! thar' be the hills!" exclaimed Martin, as through a rift in the forest he caught a glimpse of the high ground.

"Stop—wait a moment," eagerly cried Mabel, her eyes fixed upon the hill. "I think I know—yes! I know that place! But we are too far up—the village is down there—about two miles away."

"I thought so—jest what I counted on. It wouldn't do to go straight thar', you know, 'ca'se, natur'ly the red-skins 'd think we would, an' 'll look fer us thar' fust. So ef we're here, we kin sorter slide 'round an' come in at the back door, like, an' fool 'em that way. See?"

"Yes—but I am—I fear I am worn out," gasped Mabel, her limbs tottering beneath her.

"Yes—ye—we must take rest. Pore gal! I feel fer ye, but it can't be helped. We must 'a' did it or else got robbed. But lean on me, heavy; so. Now we kin git to the hill tinner, an' stop fer a-hour."

"Will it be safe?"

"Yes—an' ef not we must do it anyhow. You cain't go no farder 'thout rest."

"Leave me and go on ahead. You can then come or send some one after me."

"Nary time I don't leave ye. We'll stick together now. Cheer up, we're 'most thar'."

In a few minutes, slow as their progress necessarily was, the hill was gained and Mabel soon reclining beneath a dense cluster of vine-laden bushes, in a hollow, while Martin busied himself in effacing their trail for some yards from the hiding-place. Then he, too, flung himself down for a much-needed repose from the excessive toils of the past night.

But his mind was far from being at ease. He knew not at what moment the enemy might appear, and though the rifle he had taken from the boat seemed a good one, the supply of ammunition was scanty. He could only count upon half a dozen shots, at the most.

Tired and jaded though he was, Shafer resolved upon a new plan, and hastened to divulge it to Mabel. Wearily she gave consent, and he set about preparing for it.

He was to leave her hidden and at once hasten to the village and claim help by showing his message from Black Pierre. Then he was to return for her, with assistance, after which means were to be taken to avenge the death of her kindred.

On the whole, it was a better and more feasible plan than the first. So Martin started, effacing all traces of his foot-steps for some distance from where Mabel lay hidden, now soundly slumbering, utterly exhausted by fatigue and great grief.

CHAPTER XI.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

THE two seemed met as though parted for years instead of merely hours. Then Barham glanced wonderingly around him, starting as his eyes dwelt upon the forms and faces of these two strange beings, father and daughter.

"'Riah," said Pete, "this is a 'ticklar friend o' mine, an'

so he'll be o' your'n, soon's you know what he's did fer you. Saved Frank's life, he did—him 'nd her."

"What—not *my* Frank?" cried Uriah, in wonderment.

"Just so," and then Pete ran over the event, as related to him; but by no means lessening the peril or the deeds.

"Sir," said Barham, brokenly, turning to the giant, "let me thank you. I shall never forget this service, and if the time ever comes when you need a friend, you can be sure of finding one in me."

"An' me, too," echoed Pete. "Me an' 'Riah al'ays goes together. He don't know nothin' 'ithout me. I hev to tell him every thin' to do, an' how to do it, an' then hafe the time I hev to go an' do it myself fust, a'ter all. Awful feller, *he is!*"

"Dry up, Pete, and attend to business," said Uriah, impatiently; then turning to the giant he added: "May I see my boy now?"

"Of course—come. I will show you the way."

Meantime the savages had not been idle, but, recovering from their alarm, were busily engaged in forming their plans. They could tell that their enemies were ensconced in some secret cavity, and that they were at least three in number.

They fancied not the idea of making a bold and open onset, for they knew that at least three of their number were fated to fall, in such a case, and the uncomfortable idea assailed each that he might be one of those selected. No, they must try strategy; then, if that failed, they could still resort to bolder measures, for revenge they would have, at all and every cost.

Suddenly a number of the dusky warriors stole from their caverns, and with such precautions that Pete was unable to gain a shot at them, keeping concealed behind the numerous boulders, they gradually scaled the hill, in a roundabout direction, finally gaining a point beyond view of the cave entrance. They then proceeded more speedily and boldly.

While some gathered grass and dried weeds, another stole swiftly along until directly over the spot where crouched Pete although both were hidden from the other's view. He saw that the mouth of the cave, or alcove like ledge, would catch

the burning stuff, and believed they could smoke the pale-faces out.

And in a measure this plan succeeded. Not that it seriously discommoded the besieged, for there were by far too many loops and crevices by which the smoke could find exit, but the intense heat forced them from the immediate entrance, and so obstructed their view that nothing could be seen of the movements of those upon the outside.

Upon this fact also had the savages counted, as will be seen. Those above, yelling with shrill and exultant fury, still flung down the fuel upon the fire that roared and crackled so fiercely, sending its long and forked tongues far into the first chamber, the intense heat causing the skins and furs to shrivel and char, and the perspiration to run in little rills down the faces of the besieged.

The Indians only chose light, flashy material, such as grass and weeds, so that though an unusually great heat, mingled with a blinding, stinging smoke, was the result, only a few minutes would be required to elapse ere the rocks would be sufficiently cool to allow a passage from without, after the fire died away. But this fact was not noted by the occupants of the cave.

All at once the hideous uproar from without appeared to die away, and not a human voice could be heard. Even the fire seemed to burn more quietly, and ceased to roar and crackle.

"The devils is up to some mischief," muttered Pete, as he handled his hot rifle uneasily. "Keep yer eyes peeled."

"What do you think it is?" anxiously queried the giant.

"Don't know—tell you better a'ter they show thar hand."

"Don't talk—*watch!*" added Barham.

This suspense was trying indeed, and the faces of the three men were an anxious look. They longed for something to break the death-like silence; an onset from the foe would be preferable to this.

And that onset speedily came. The red skins had crawled up close to the cave entrance, covered by the fire and smoke, and now believing that the rocks were sufficiently cooled, and seeing—for the screen of bushes had melted away before the intense heat—that one agile leap from the hillside would carry

them into the cave's mouth, the word was passed along and the dusky horde sprung forward.

Not a single cry heralded their coming, and the first intimation the defenders had of their coming, was the filling of the cave entrance with their dark, half-nude forms. But, despite this, they were not taken totally unawares.

They had been anticipating just some such move, and simultaneously their rifles belched forth their contents, carrying death and dismay into the ranks of the enemy. For one instant the red-skins faltered; they had not counted upon such a reception, after the fiery ordeal to which the pale-faces had been subjected.

"Fall back, men!" shouted the giant; and then, as the red-skins fired a volley, the whites disappeared from view.

Believing they had conquered, the Indians sprung forward with wild yells, only to find out their error.

Two more reports, accompanied by the sharp twanging of a bow-string, greeted them, and again they faltered. From the sides of the narrow passage the besieged had seized fresh weapons, placed there for such an emergency, and were now busily plying them.

Utterly dismayed the red-skins broke and fled as far as the entrance, where they crouched down behind the still heated rocks, repulsed but not berten. They were only the more firmly resolved to annihilate the desperate enemy; their slain comrades must be avenged.

"Haww fer heeray!" yelled Pete, exultantly, as he quickly recharged his rifle.

"Ha!" exclaimed Barham, as he sprung forward and caught the reeling form of the giant in his arms. "My God! you are hurt?"

"Yes—a little," was the faint reply. "But never mind me—keep them from harming her!"

"Call me, Pete, when you need me," said Uriah, as he dragged the helpless form to one side and deposited it upon a bear-skin.

He found upon examination that a bullet had pierced the giant's chest, and that it had bled profusely. He feared the worst. The wound seemed fatal.

And then the giant made a strange disclosure, believing his

last hour had come. The hunter listened with breathless interest.

Paul Arnaud was a refugee from justice, though as he affirmed, an innocent one. His brother had been robbed and murdered in Philadelphia, and suspicion had fallen upon him.

Fearing arrest and knowing how damning was the circumstantial evidence against him, he had fled with his child—an only daughter—hotly pursued, and finally made his way to this wild and lonely spot. He had assumed his present disguise—coloring his hands and face black, with the addition of a wig and false beard—the better to conceal his identity. For nearly a year he had remained hidden, and until the night upon which Frank Barham had discovered him not one word had he spoken to mortal man.

But now he believed he was dying, and begged Barham to take charge of his daughter and see that she was at once joined to her friends, as no stain, other than being the child of a reputed murderer, could be brought against her name. And then the giant sunk back into a death-like stupor.

Fully an hour was consumed in this confession, and scarcely had it ended when Pete called for help. The crisis had come, the red skins once more advanced to the onset, this time resolved to carry all before them.

Barham summoned Camilla to the side of her father, and then joined Shafer. The two men, furnished with plenty of weapons, that Pete had busied himself in preparing for use, boldly met the tide and hurled it back.

From their covert they could not be seen save by the flash of their weapons, while the enemy, outlined against the light beyond the entrance, were fully exposed to their aim. And soon the narrow passage was obstructed by the bodies of the dead and dying.

The red-skins were forced to pause in order to drag them back, ere they could advance further. And then the two scouts fell back upon the silent but scarcely less fatal bows and arrows.

How the struggle would have terminated is doubtful had not there come an opportune interruption in the shape of a series of shrill yells and hoots from without.

With cries of dismay the surviving backs turned and fled

from the spot of death. But they did so only to confront a no less merciless foe.

The two scouts sprung to the entrance and divined the truth as they beheld a well-known form, the figure of young Martin Sharer, who was at the head of a strong body of friendly Winnebagocs.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

MARTIN SHARER had hastened to the Indian village after leaving Mabel, arriving there in safety, and was warmly greeted upon showing the buck-skin message sent by Black Pierre. Mabel was brought in, and then, under guidance of Martin, a strong party sallied forth to avenge the death of the settler and his son.

While searching for the trail, near the cabin, now in ruins, they had heard the sound of firing, at a distance, and following it up, guided by the smoke, had arrived just in time to join the fight against the Sauks, who were a portion of those who had so relentlessly hunted the fugitive couple, as before detailed.

Pete and Barham soon made themselves known, and then the slaughter was kept up until scarcely one of the Sauks escaped to tell the tragic tale.

But our "yarn" is nearly completed. A few words and we have done.

Frank Barham soon recovered sufficiently to bear removal to the settlement, as also did the giant refugee, whose wound proved far less severe than at first supposed. And while there, the young man managed to make himself indispensable to his fair nurse—the one whom he had first known as the "Black Princess"—at least in her estimation.

Uncle, seeing this, made a journey to Philadelphia and confirmed the assertion of Ann-ed, for he found that the real murderer had been discovered and had already met with the reward of his crime. His report earned great joy to the hearts of the entire party.

Black Hawk was finally captured by a party of Winnegoboes and delivered to the United States authorities at Prairie Du Chien. His subsequent fate all students of our history are conversant with.

Martin Shafer faithfully redeemed his promise, and the unfortunate settler and his son were bitterly avenged. At the close of the war he claimed and obtained the reward of his services; and Mabel Calmet became Mrs. Martin Shafer—a deed that neither of them ever had cause to regret.

At the same time Frank and Camilla Arnaud were united.

As for Pete Shafer and Uriah Barham, they lived long enough to be called grandfather by the lisping lips of more than one toddling youngster, and died at a green old age.

And now, we bid them farewell, forever!



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DIME DIALOGUES, NO. 8.

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FINE DIALOGUES, NO. 5.

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Eight o'clock. For two little girls.
True dignity. A colloquy. For two boys.
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The figures. For several small children.
The trial of Peter Sloper. For seven boys.

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Should women be given the ballot? For boys.

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The light of love. For two boys.
The flower children. For twelve girls.
The deaf uncle. For three boys.
A discussion. For two boys.

The rehearsal. For a school.
The rehearsal. For three boys and one girl.
A practical life lesson. For three girls.
The rehearsal. For two boys.
The rehearsal. For two girls.
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The rehearsal. For three boys.
The rehearsal. For three boys.
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A rehearsal. For two boys.
The rehearsal. For two boys.

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Diarists wanted. For several characters.
When I was young. For two girls.
The most precious heritage. For two boys.
The double cure. Two males and four females.
The flower-garden fairy. For five little girls.
Jennin's novel. Three males and two females.
Beware of the widow. For three girls.

A family not to pattern after. Ten characters.
How to manage. An acting charade.
The vacation escapade. Four boys and ten girls.
That naughty boy. Three females and a male.
Mad-can. An acting charade.
All is not gold that glitters. Acting movement.
Sic transit gloria mundi. Acting charade.

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Two o'clock in the morning. For three males.
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Before and after the end. Several characters.
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Not on a rehearsal. For several characters.
A rehearsal. For several characters.
Some vs. some. For several characters.

Worth, not wealth. For four boys and a teacher.
No such word as fail. For several males.
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The rehearsal. For several boys.
The rehearsal. For several boys.
The rehearsal. For several boys.

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Collected Biting Heat. For two children.	Too much for Aunt Martha. For three females.
How a male of a property. A dish.	Wit against wit. Three females and one male.
The house on the hill. For four females.	A sudden recovery. For three males.
Enough. For two males.	The double stratagem. For four females.
Worth and wealth. For four females.	Counting chickens before they were hatched. For four males.
Waterfall. For several.	

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High art; or the new opera. For two girls.	A rainy day, or, the coming of a storm. For three young ladies.
Strange adventures. For two boys.	God is love. For a number of scholars.
The king's supper. For four girls.	The way he managed. For two males and two females.
A practical exemplification. For two boys.	Barbary. Various characters, wags and dunces.
Monsieur Thomas. A series; or, Yankee vs. Frenchman. For four boys.	The little doctor. For two girls.
Dora's diplomacy. 3 females and 1 incidental.	A sweet revenge. For four boys.
A Frenchman, or, the converted aunt. For two males and one gentleman.	A May day. For three little girls.
	From the old line. For two males and one female.
	Heart not lace. For five boys.

DIME DIALOGUES, No. 23.

Phyllis' letter. For six males, 1 male.	A bear garden. For three males, two females.
How a male of a property. For two males.	The busy bees. For three little girls.
Cherry and the cherry. For two little boys.	Chickadee. For numerous characters.
The great and the small. For six females.	Small time. For two little girls.
Does it pay? For six males.	Death and the doctor. For two characters and a dog.
Company matters. For two males and two females.	Dr. as a gold. Several characters, male and female.
The glad day. For two little boys.	Confession. For three males, two females.
Unfortunate Mr. Brown. For 1 male, 6 females.	Immense vs. power. For seven males.
The real cost. For two girls.	Red ants all. For four females.

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An unjust man. For four males.	Yours truly. For two girls.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	The old and young. 1 gentleman, 1 female.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	That good old. 2 males and 1 female.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	Between Grace and her husband. A woman school fancy dress, dialogue and review.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	

DIME DIALOGUES, No. 25.

The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	The true use of wealth. For a whole school.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	Character. For numerous characters.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	Put yourself in the place. For two girls.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	How a male of a property. For two girls.
The great and the small. 1 male, 3 females.	The regeneration. For five boys.
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